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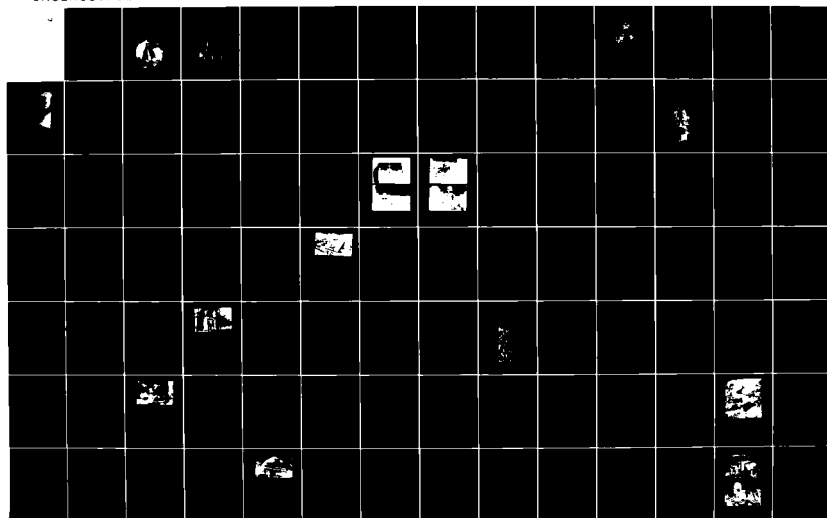
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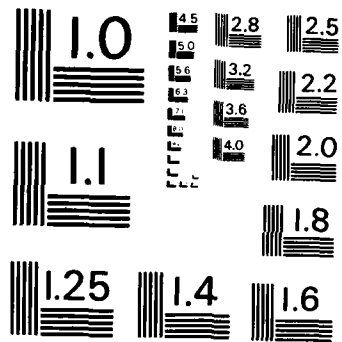
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# Guatemala

a country study



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# Guatemala

## a country study

Foreign Area Studies  
The American University  
Edited by  
Richard F. Nyrop  
Research completed  
May 1983





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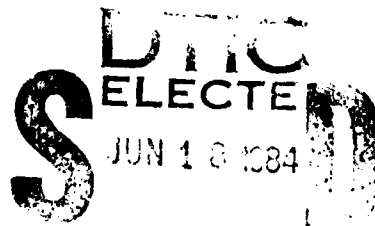
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## Foreword

This volume is one of a continuing series of books prepared by Foreign Area Studies, The American University, under the Country Studies/Area Handbook Program. The last page of this book provides a listing of other published studies. Each book in the series deals with a particular foreign country, describing and analyzing its economic, national security, political, and social systems and institutions and examining the interrelationships of those systems and institutions and the ways that they are shaped by cultural factors. Each study is written by a multidisciplinary team of social scientists. The authors seek to provide a basic insight and understanding of the society under observation, striving for a dynamic rather than a static portrayal of it. The study focuses on historical antecedents and on the cultural, political, and socioeconomic characteristics that contribute to cohesion and cleavage within the society. Particular attention is given to the origins and traditions of the people who make up the society, their dominant beliefs and values, their community of interests and the issues on which they are divided, the nature and extent of their involvement with the national institutions, and their attitudes toward each other and toward the social system and political order within which they live.

The contents of the book represent the views, opinions, and findings of Foreign Area Studies and should not be construed as an official Department of the Army position, policy, or decision, unless so designated by other official documentation. The authors have sought to adhere to accepted standards of scholarly objectivity. Such corrections, additions, and suggestions for factual or other changes that readers may have will be welcomed for use in future new editions.

William Evans-Smith  
Director, Foreign Area Studies  
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## Contents

	Page
Foreword . . . . .	iii
Acknowledgments . . . . .	v
Preface . . . . .	ix
Country Profile . . . . .	xi
Introduction . . . . .	xvii
Chapter 1. Historical Setting : . . . .	1

*Jan Knippers Black and  
Martin C. Needler*

PRECONQUEST GUATEMALA—CONQUEST AND  
EARLY SETTLEMENT—THE COLONIAL PERIOD—  
Government—Education, Religion, and Culture—The Colo-  
nial Economy—CENTRAL AMERICAN INDEPEND-  
ENCE—INDEPENDENT GUATEMALA: THE EARLY  
YEARS—THE UBICO ERA—THE ABORTIVE REVO-  
LUTION—The Arévalo Presidency—The Arbenz Presi-  
dency—FOREIGN INTERESTS—THE COUNTER-  
REVOLUTION—DEVELOPMENT AND AUTHORITAR-  
IANISM—THE 1970s

Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment: . . . .	41
---	----

*P.A. Kluck*

GEOGRAPHY—Pacific Coast—Highlands—Caribbean Coast  
and River Valleys—Petén—POPULATION—SOCIAL OR-  
GANIZATION—Regional and Ethnic Diversity—Rural-Ur-  
ban Variation—Family and Kinship—RELIGION—Indigenous  
Belief Systems—Roman Catholicism—Protestantism—ED-  
UCATION—HEALTH

Chapter 3. The Economy . . . . .	83
----------------------------------	----

*Darrel R. Eglin*

GROWTH AND STRUCTURE OF THE ECONOMY—  
ROLE OF GOVERNMENT—LABOR FORCE—AGRI-  
CULTURE—Land Use—Landownership and Agrarian Re-  
form—Cropping Patterns and Production—Livestock—  
Forestry—Fishing—INDUSTRY—Energy—Mining—Man-  
ufacturing—BANKING AND MONETARY POLICY—  
FOREIGN TRADE—BALANCE OF PAYMENTS

Chapter 4. Government and Politics: . . . . .	127
---	-----

*James D. Rudolph*

THE DOMINANT ROLE OF THE ARMY—A TRANSI-  
TION TO DEMOCRACY?—FORMAL STRUCTURE OF  
GOVERNMENT—Constitutional Basis—Executive—Legis-

lature—Judiciary—Local Government—CIVILIAN POLITICAL ACTORS—The Private Sector—Religious Institutions—Popular Organizations—Insurgents—THE ELECTORAL SYSTEM—Political Parties—Elections—FOREIGN RELATIONS—Latin America—The United States—Extrahemisphere

## Chapter 5. National Security . . . . . 177

*Eugene K. Keefe*

POSITION OF ARMED FORCES IN GOVERNMENT AND SOCIETY—Constitutional Basis—Military Traditions—The 1982 Coup d'Etat—The State of Siege—Personnel—Foreign Military Influence—ADMINISTRATION, ORGANIZATION, AND TRAINING—Army—Air Force—Navy—Training—Uniforms, Ranks, and Insignia—PUBLIC ORDER AND INTERNAL SECURITY—Law Enforcement—Crime and Punishment—Threats to Internal Security

## Appendix. Tables . . . . . 219

## Bibliography . . . . . 229

## Glossary . . . . . 251

## Index . . . . . 253

### List of Figures

1 Administrative divisions (Departments) and Capitals, 1983 . . . . .	xvi
2 Middle America, 1983 . . . . .	5
3 Topography and Drainage . . . . .	47
4 Transportation, 1982 . . . . .	93
5 Administrative Organization of Government, January 1983 . . . . .	141
6 Evolution of Major Political Parties, 1954-82 . . . . .	165
7 Insignia of Officers' Ranks, July 1982 . . . . .	199

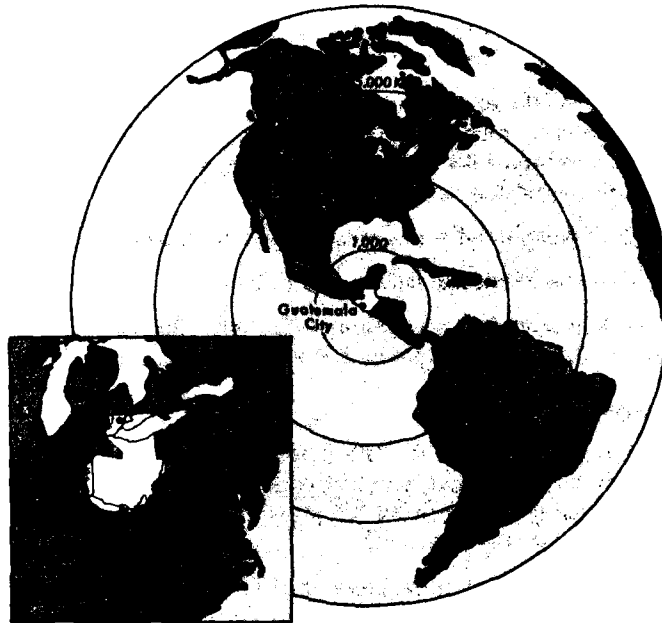
## Preface

*Guatemala: A Country Study* replaces the *Area Handbook for Guatemala*, which was published in 1970 and was seriously out of date. Throughout the 1970s and early 1980s Guatemala, the most populous of the Central American republics, experienced an intensification of socioeconomic and political turmoil and tension and of the almost constant warfare waged by the armed forces against their various opponents—most notably moderate politicians, liberal Catholic clergy, and left-wing revolutionaries. The coup d'état of March 23, 1982, the subsequent assumption of presidential power by Brigadier General José Efraín Ríos Montt, and the counterinsurgency policies instituted by his government were the most recent episodes of the nation's internal strife, the outcome of which could not be foreseen in mid-1983.

Like its predecessor, the present country study is an attempt to treat in a compact and objective manner the dominant social, political, economic, and national security aspects of contemporary Guatemalan society. Sources of information included scholarly journals and monographs, official reports of governments and international organizations, foreign and domestic newspapers, numerous periodicals, and interviews with individuals who have special competence in Guatemalan and Central American affairs. Chapter bibliographies appear at the end of the book; brief comments on some of the more valuable sources as possible further reading appear at the end of each chapter. Measurements are given in the metric system; a conversion table is provided to assist those readers who are unfamiliar with metric measurements (see table 1, Appendix). A Glossary is also included.

Although there are numerous variations, Spanish surnames generally consist of two parts: the patrilineal name followed by the matrilineal. For example, in late 1983 the new chief of state was Brigadier General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores. Mejía is his father's family name; Victores, his mother's. In nonformal use the matrilineal is often, although not always, dropped. After the first mention, therefore, we have usually referred to him as General Mejía. President José Efraín Ríos Montt, who uses Efraín as his given name, is referred to as Ríos Montt.

## Country Profile



### Country

**Formal Name:** Republic of Guatemala.

**Short Form:** Guatemala.

**Term for Citizens:** Guatemalan(s).

**Capital:** Guatemala. (To avoid confusion, called Guatemala City in this study.)

### Geography

**Size:** Approximately 108,780 square kilometers.

**Topography:** Four major regions: Pacific coast, Highlands, Caribbean coast and river valleys, and Petén (rain forest). Numerous volcanoes in Highlands, which are also subject to violent earthquakes.

**Climate:** Varies with altitude; hot in lowlands, and cool in Highlands. Most of country experiences distinct dry season that lasts about six months, but department of Petén and area along Caribbean coast humid entire year.

## **Society**

**Population:** Estimated 7.6 million in mid-1983. Annual growth rate estimated 2.5 to 2.9 percent

**Education and Literacy:** Education compulsory for six-year primary school, but only 50 percent of urban children and 5 percent of rural complete program. Literacy approximately 50 percent in 1983; only about 20 percent of Indians literate.

**Health and Welfare:** Leading causes of death gastroenteritis, pneumonia, influenza, measles, whooping cough, anemia, dysentery, tuberculosis, and bronchitis. Public health services good in capital, virtually nonexistent in rural areas.

**Language:** Spanish and numerous Mayan languages.

**Ethnic Groups:** Primarily ladino and Indian.

**Religion:** Roughly 80 percent Roman Catholic, 20 percent Protestant; Protestants divided among over 100 sects, mostly evangelical.

## **Economy**

**Gross Domestic Product (GDP):** About US\$9.3 billion in 1982, approximately US\$1,200 per capita. Economy in recession in 1983; real GDP had declined perhaps by 3.5 percent in 1982 along with severe balance of payments constraints.

**Agriculture:** Contributed 25 percent of GDP in 1981 and employed about 58 percent of labor force. Most farming subsistence or less. Main foods produced: corn, beans, and meat.

**Energy:** Firewood a major source. A few hydroelectric sites developed but much greater potential. Small amounts of low-quality crude oil discovered and more likely. Crude oil production above 2 million barrels in 1982, and exports of US\$47 million.

**Industry:** Contributed 18 percent of GDP in 1981, of which 16 percent manufacturing. Main manufactured products: food, beverages, textiles, clothing, shoes, and cement. Small domestic market required substantial exports, mainly to Central America, to achieve any economies of scale. Manufacturing required substantial protection to compete.

**Exports:** US\$1.2 billion in 1981. Main products coffee (US\$295 million), cotton (US\$131 million), sugar (US\$85 million), bananas (US\$51 million), cardamom (US\$34 million), and crude oil (US\$22 million).

**Imports:** US\$1.6 billion in 1981. Main imports crude oil and refined products (23 percent), machinery and transport equipment, chemicals, manufactured products, and food, particularly wheat and flour.

**Exchange Rate:** One quetzal per US\$1 since 1925.

**Fiscal Year:** Calendar year.



**External Public Debt:** US\$860 million (estimated), end of 1982—one of lowest on per capita basis in Latin America. Debt servicing less than 4 percent of exports in 1981.

### **Transportation and Communications**

**Roads:** 26,429 kilometers, of which 2,850 paved, 11,438 kilometers gravel, and 12,140 kilometers earth. Adequate main system linking major settled areas, although maintenance low; feeder roads in farming areas and main roads in north inadequate. Highways main form of freight and passenger movement.

**Railroads:** 909 kilometers, of which 819 kilometers government owned. All 0.914-meter gauge. System links both coasts, connects to Salvadoran and Mexican systems.

**Inland Waterways:** 260 kilometers navigable all year; additional 730 kilometers open to shipping during high water.

**Ports:** Main port Santo Tomás de Castilla on Caribbean. Former main port, nearby Puerto Barrios damaged in 1976 earthquake, not fully reconstructed by 1983. Pacific ports of San José and Champerico inadequate for volume of cargo and in need of repair.

**Airfields:** 532, of which 527 usable; only 10 had paved runways in 1983. Two with runways of 2,440 to 3,659 meters.

**Telecommunications:** Modern telecommunications facilities largely concentrated in capital. Adequate links abroad, including one Atlantic Ocean satellite station. Country connected to Central American microwave net.

### **Government and Politics**

**Government:** Military dictatorship led by President (Brigadier General) José Efraín Ríos Montt remained in power in mid-1983. Executive power shared with General Staff of the Army and General Staff of the Presidency. Unicameral legislature (Congress) dismissed in March 1982. Judiciary, headed by president of the judiciary who was also president of Supreme Court, statutorily independent of executive. Twenty-two departmental governments formed administrative subdivisions of central government. Municipal government officials, formerly autonomous from central government, appointed by chief executive after March 1982. Constitutional basis provided by 1982 Fundamental Statute of Government.

**Politics:** Dominated by Guatemalan Army. Political parties in recess, supposedly will resume activities under political opening announced in March 1983. Private sector traditionally dominant among civilian actors; popular sectors' periodic violent repression limits their participation; guerrilla insurgency existing since 1960.

**International Relations:** Limited in scope and content. Only relationships of importance with Mexico, Central America, and United States. United States relations most important after 1954; human rights concerns soured these in 1977, but by 1983 relations slightly improved.

**International Agreements and Memberships:** Guatemala party to Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (Rio Treaty) and Treaty of Tlatelolco. Member of Organization of American States, United Nations and many of its specialized agencies, World Bank, International Monetary Fund, and Inter-American Development Bank.

## **National Security**

**Armed Forces:** Total strength in early 1983 about 29,000. Army, 27,000; air force, 650; and navy, 960. Air force and navy integral components of army but had considerable autonomy. Conscripts made up about 20 to 25 percent of army strength.

**Military Units:** In early 1983 army had 30 battalions—two paratroop, one engineer, and 27 infantry—supported by 12 artillery mortar batteries, plus Presidential Guard Battalion in capital. Units considerably smaller than United States counterparts. Territorial control exercised through 22 military zones, roughly equivalent to the 22 administrative departments (less the department of Petén). Air force divided into seven squadrons, including one ground support squadron. Navy actually coast guard; two-thirds of strength in a marine battalion.

**Equipment:** Mostly old United States armaments; a few World War II tanks and artillery pieces in army, but small arms mostly Israeli Galil and Uzi. Air force ground support squadron had aging Cessna A-37Bs. Some new Israeli transports on hand, and several new Bell helicopters converted into gunships. Navy had some Broadsword- and Cutlass-class patrol craft commissioned in 1970s in addition to several older boats.

**Police:** National Police primary countrywide law enforcement agency; strength in early 1983 about 9,500. Treasury Police (about 2,100) primarily customs agency. Mobile Military Police (about 3,000) powerful adjunct to National Police. Technical Investigation Department, plainclothes investigative arm of National Police, replaced former Detective Corps in 1982. Police agencies, as well as armed forces, heavily engaged in counterinsurgency for more than two decades.



NOTE: Names of department capitals are the same as those of departments unless otherwise indicated.  
 Figure 1. Administrative Divisions (Departments) and Capitals, 1983

## Introduction

ON THE MORNING of August 8, 1983—more than three months after research and writing had been completed for this book—Minister of National Defense Brigadier General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores and the Army High Command of the Military Commanders Council removed Brigadier General José Efraín Ríos Montt from the presidency in a swift coup d'état in which some seven people were killed and a few injured. A proclamation by the military chiefs stated that Mejía Victores would retain his position as defense minister and would rule the nation as chief of state, not as president. Thus ended the nearly 17-month regime of Ríos Montt, who on assuming power in the aftermath of a coup on March 23, 1982, had informed his fellow citizens that "God had decided that I would become president of this nation."

The military proclamation also set forth as the justifications for the coup—which was described as a military action, not a coup—the existence of "a small group . . . seeking to perpetuate itself in power indefinitely," the presence of "a religious, fanatic, and aggressive group . . . ignoring the essential principle of separation of church and state," and the need "to eradicate administrative corruption at all levels." The proclamation made clear, however, that the Army High Command was primarily concerned with its own institutional well-being: "We are aware, above all, that the unity of the army must be preserved and strengthened, maintaining the principle of hierarchy and subordination, in order to frustrate the attempts of some elements who have tried to divide and confuse the armed institution."

It is unlikely that the coup—and the reasons put forward in explanation—came as a surprise to Ríos Montt. Throughout his period in office there were continuous reports of coups attempted or in preparation (see *A Transition to Democracy?*, ch. 4). From early 1983 onward there were increasing rumors of unrest within the military hierarchy because of Ríos Montt's reliance on a small group of young officers and on his coparishioners in the Church of the Word (*Iglesia del Verbo*)—a fundamentalist, evangelical Protestant sect to which Ríos Montt had converted and of which he was an elder (see *Protestantism*, ch. 2; *Religious Institutions*, ch. 4). The young officers included junior and mid-level officers who under the leadership of Captain Carlos Rodolfo Muñoz Pilona had executed the March 1982 coup and had invited Ríos Montt to head the military junta (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). These officers had supported Ríos Montt when he dismissed the other two members of the junta, Brigadier General Horacio Egberto Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez, and assumed the presidency. Ríos Montt retained many of these officers in key positions, most notably in the General Staff of the Presidency, and the power and influence of this group became increasingly irksome to the army hierarchy (see *Executive*, ch. 4). In addition, in June 1983 individuals who had been involved in the March 1982 coup,

such as Gordillo and Leonel Sisniega Otero, reemerged politically with calls for Ríos Montt to resign, and several observers concluded that these individuals either had or would soon secure support within the officer corps. This possibility added to the concern of those military commanders who wished to preserve the military's unity and cohesion.

By May Ríos Montt was being subjected to sustained criticism by three powerful interest groups: the Roman Catholic hierarchy, businessmen and industrialists, and large landowners. In a document entitled "Confirmed in Our Faith," dated May 22, the Conference of Catholic Bishops accused Ríos Montt's government of responsibility for "a growing militarization" of the country and charged that there were still frequent "cases of missing persons" and that "massacres are still being carried out" by the military in some parts of the country. The hierarchy also criticized the obligatory participation of Indians in civil defense patrols and the existence and functions of the special courts (see Judiciary, ch. 4; Law Enforcement, ch. 5; Threats to Internal Security, ch. 5). And in a thrust aimed directly at Ríos Montt, the Catholic spokesmen asserted that the "aggressive escalation" of proselytization by Protestant fundamentalist sects posed a danger to society.

Business and industrial groups were incensed by a tax reform proposal that included a 10-percent value-added tax (VAT: Impuesto al Valor Agregado—IVA). Government officials let it be known that international lenders, meaning particularly the International Monetary Fund (IMF), would refuse to lend further funds unless Guatemala increased its tax revenues, among the lowest per capita in Latin America (see Role of Government, ch. 3). Many of the large landowners supported the VAT proposal because agricultural exports were exempted, but they were vociferously opposed to government proposals of modest land reform measures.

It was in an already tense political situation that Brigadier General José Guillermo Echeverría Vielman—in length of service the senior army officer on active duty—sent a public letter to Ríos Montt. Echeverría urged that the tax reform be postponed until an elected legislature could debate and vote on the measure, stated that the military should retire from its dominant role in the government, and lamented the "loss" of Belize. He directed his sharpest criticism against the evangelical sectarianism "being practiced at the highest levels of government . . . producing an unnecessary offense to the Catholic population, which sooner or later will make known its repudiation." The general paid to have his letter read on a popular news broadcast on June 5, and the letter appeared in numerous newspapers the next day. On June 8 Echeverría was dismissed from active service for having violated military regulations, but by that time numerous groups, including the Roman Catholic hierarchy, had publicly endorsed the general's position. The far right political parties, particularly the National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional—MLN), increased their criticism of government policies and their demands for

early elections. The call by the MLN for early elections undoubtedly reflected its judgment that because they were well organized and the moderates and conservatives were not, the MLN would win in an early election (see Political Parties, ch. 4).

Events reached a climax of sorts in June. Ríos Montt met with several leaders of political parties on June 24 and 25 and on Army Day, June 30, with many or all of the military commanders. In the midst of this, on June 28 Gordillo delivered a vehement attack on Ríos Montt on a popular television program. This was followed later in the evening by a broadcast of an interview with Sisniega, who set forth a detailed denunciation of government policies but took care to distance himself from Gordillo and the leaders of the MLN.

In response to these pressures Ríos Montt agreed to fix the date for constituent assembly elections, dissolved the young officers advisory council (the General Staff of the Presidency), and imposed a "state of alarm," an emergency martial law measure that reimposed most of the restrictions on civil liberties that had been lifted on March 22, 1983 (see *A Transition to Democracy?*, ch. 4). In a related measure some 50 military officers were transferred from civilian jobs back to military postings. On June 30 Ríos Montt formally inaugurated the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, which was assigned the task of preparing for and conducting the elections (see Elections, ch. 4). The five members of the tribunal enjoyed considerable public prestige; its president, Arturo Herbruger Asturias, had served as a minister in the government of President Juan José Arévalo and had been appointed president of the Supreme Court by President Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán (see *The Abortive Revolution*, ch. 1).

Despite these pressing problems, Ríos Montt publicly remained unperturbed. On August 1 he announced that the constituent assembly elections would be held July 1, 1984, and that the assembly would convene on September 15, 1984. He also asserted that the "roots of Central America's frailty lie in its grave social problems, its ideological disputes, and its age-old dependence." He opined that "the power policy, the so-called hard-line policy . . . leaves no room for arbitration" and that "the East-West confrontation must be removed" from Central America. "We want to be neither East nor West, but simply Middle America." On August 5, three days before the coup, he dismissed queries by foreign reporters about coup attempts as "*pelas en la sopa*" (hairs in the soup). Three of the six young officers who were the target of officer corps objections had not been removed from their posts, and Sergio Alvaro Contreras Valladeres and Francisco Bianchi Castillo, elders of the Church of the Word, continued to report daily to their offices in the National Palace.

Although elements of the presidential guard engaged in a spirited though brief defense, the coup went smoothly. According to various observers, the chief of the national defense general staff, Brigadier General Héctor Mario López Fuentes, orchestrated the attack and the presence later in the day of the military commanders who signed the

proclamation that deposed Ríos Montt and installed Mejía Victores. A few days after the coup Mejía stated in a television interview that "about a month ago" Ríos Montt had met with "all the military commanders" and had promised that "when all the commanders met in general assembly and asked him to resign he would comply." Mejía then observed that "that took place on Monday, August 8." He added that Ríos Montt had been placed on inactive reserve (*disponible*) and was residing in his home in the section of the city reserved for the military officers corps. Mejía stressed that his predecessor remained a free man and could leave the country if and when he pleased.

At the time of the coup the 52-year-old Mejía had been in the service for 35 years, having entered as a cadet at the military academy, the Escuela Politécnica (Polytechnical School) in 1948 (see Training, ch. 5). Shortly after promotion to brigadier general in 1980, he was designated inspector general of the army and soon thereafter the vice minister of national defense; Ríos Montt named him defense minister in July 1982. Although inexperienced in international and regional affairs, Mejía possessed considerable command experience and acted quickly and decisively on several issues. He announced on August 9 that the state of alarm had been lifted and on August 14 that the special courts—the objects of fear by the citizenry and of condemnation by international human rights organizations—would cease operations by September 1. To the sharp disappointment of the business and commercial chambers of commerce, however, he did not rescind the VAT, but he did state that his government would "consider the possibility" of amendments to the tax reform package. He indicated that he could perceive no need for land reform.

In his early speeches and press interviews, therefore, Mejía revealed a political attitude that harked back to earlier military regimes (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). His devout Catholicism and fervent anticommunism were constant themes, albeit in nonspecific terms. In his first speech to the nation as chief of state, he reiterated the army's "responsibility for the return to institutional life" and asserted that "to fulfill this task" the army would adhere to specific guidelines, the first of which was "to fight the Marxist-Leninist subversion and the paramilitary groups that may exist." Nevertheless, on August 11 he proclaimed a 90-day amnesty to go into effect August 19 under which those who surrendered, turned in their weapons, provided information, and took an oath to engage in no further antigovernment activities would not be punished. Although the Roman Catholic Church had made known its objections to the compulsory participation of the Indians in civil self-defense operations, Mejía stated that his government would "strengthen the people's organizations through civil defense." He added, however, that the government would "eliminate all possibilities of religious or political manipulation directed against the beliefs and feelings of the majority and against our customs and culture," a stipulation that was expected to blunt the criticisms of the Catholic hierarchy.

On August 19 Mejía indicated that when the constituent assembly convened, he would propose that all active-duty military officers be banned as presidential candidates and that former defense ministers would be ineligible until they had been out of office for three years. If the constituent assembly were to adopt the proposal and if presidential elections were held in early 1985, Mejía would be excluded from participation, as would Ríos Montt, who served as defense minister from March to July 1982. Such active-duty officers as General López Fuentes, however, would become eligible on retirement. Herbruger, the president of the Supreme Electoral Tribunal, confirmed that Mejía had discussed the suggestion in a meeting with members of the tribunal and added that Mejía and the tribunal members had discussed the possibility of advancing the date of the assembly elections. Herbruger stated that the aim was to hold the elections as soon as possible but that the mechanics of preparing a registry of eligible voters were so difficult that elections before July 1, 1984, might not be possible.

In the days and weeks after the coup, domestic and foreign observers sought to determine what might be expected from Mejía in foreign policy matters. On some issues he proved to be less than diplomatic. In an interview with a Spanish television company for transmission to Spain, Mejía was asked to comment on the Guatemalan police attack on the Spanish embassy in January 1980, during which most of the people in the building were burned to death and as a result of which Spain broke diplomatic relations (see *Threats to Internal Security*, ch. 5). Mejía responded that he believed that diplomatic relations should be restored, but he then asserted that the Spanish ambassador had "collaborated" with the peasants who had seized the building and were holding the ambassador and his staff as hostages. The Spanish government sharply rejected Mejía's allegations, and it seemed unlikely that diplomatic relations would soon be resumed.

On August 7 Mejía had traveled to Honduras to meet with General Eugenio Vides Casanova, the commander of El Salvador's armed forces; General Gustavo Alvarez Martínez, the commander of the Honduran armed forces; and Brigadier General Frederick Woerner, a brigade commander in the United States Southern Command (SOUTHCOM), based in Panama. Mejía also visited the U.S.S. *Ranger*, the flagship of a task force then in the Pacific waters off Central America. The coincidence of Mejía's activities on the eve of the coup gave rise to allegations in Guatemala City that the United States had been involved at least peripherally in the overthrow of Ríos Montt. Despite categorical denials by the United States government, the allegations were widely believed in Guatemala.

Mejía nonetheless made it abundantly clear that he strongly supported President Ronald Reagan's policies in Central America. In a press conference on August 10, Mejía described the Nicaraguan Sandinistas as a threat "not only to Guatemala and Central America but to the entire continent." He suggested that the efforts of the Contadora



Group (Mexico, Panama, Venezuela, and Colombia) to resolve regional problems were well intended, but he declared that they could play no real role in Central America. In his meeting with the diplomatic corps a week later, he voiced Guatemala's "appreciation of the so-called Contadora Group" and its efforts to resolve regional problems, but he added that he "would like to stress, as a Guatemalan and a Central American, that the Central Americans alone should make the decisions that will enable us to achieve our objectives." These statements elicited negative reactions in Mexico City, Caracas, and Bogotá; and the president of Costa Rica, whose government endorsed the Contadora efforts, bluntly declared that his government did "not like coups d'état or the military in government."

In the weeks immediately following the coup, Mejía and his associates were forced to focus from time to time on foreign affairs, but their primary concern was to solidify their internal position, and they were reminded almost at once that they could rely on neither the armed forces nor the private sector for unqualified support. Both foreign and Guatemalan observers continued to report that Mejía and his key associate, General López Fuentes, had seized control to forestall a coup against Mejía as defense minister that was being organized by officers with links to the MLN. The MLN made it clear that it would "monitor" Mejía's government, meaning that the MLN would seek to force Mejía to hew to far-right domestic and foreign policies. The commercial interests continued to agitate for repeal of the VAT, and the landowners allowed no one to forget their opposition to land reform, no matter how mild. And within days of the coup an organization that dubbed itself "the young officers group" began to interrupt and "override" commercial radio broadcasts to proclaim opposition to the new military government and to call for socioeconomic reforms.

By August 24 Mejía reportedly had completed the changes he intended to make in the cabinet he had inherited from Ríos Montt. The more significant changes were in the ministries of foreign relations, government (or interior), and agriculture. Fernando Andrade Díaz-Durán, who had served as foreign adviser to three earlier military presidents—including Brigadier General Fernando Romeo Lucas García, who was deposed in the March 1982 coup—became foreign minister. Colonel Carlos Armando Moreira-López, who had served as the defense attaché in Washington in the late 1970s, took over as deputy foreign minister. Adolfo González Rodas replaced Ricardo Méndez Ruiz as minister of government, and Ivan Najera Farfán replaced Leopoldo Sandoval Villeda, who had recently proposed a program of land reform, as minister of agriculture. Eugenia Isabel Tejada de Putzeys assumed charge of the Ministry of Education, thus becoming the first woman to serve at the cabinet level.

On August 29 the government announced that Jorge Antonio Serrano Elías would be replaced as president of the Council of State by Ricardo Asturias Valenzuela. One month later, however, Mejía prorogued the council, stating that it had "fulfilled its delicate mission" (see Executive,

ch. 4). At least some Guatemalan observers categorized Mejia's publicly unanticipated action as a victory for the far right-wing parties, which had opposed the council's existence and role.

During its first several weeks in command the new government issued no pronouncements with respect to the nation's socioeconomic problems, nor did it indicate that any new domestic programs were envisaged. The government's silence was in keeping with the nation's history, which basically reflects the experiences of two societies, un-integrated and unequal, the conquerors and the conquered. The nation's heritage is one of deep-seated inequity, in which the land tenure patterns and labor arrangements have been and remain among the most unequal and oppressive in Latin America. In the mid-1980s the society remained essentially agricultural, but about 90 percent of the farms accounted for only about 16 percent of the farmland, resulting in plots too small to support a family at even a subsistence level.

In 1983 the society continued to be characterized by cleavages that reflected class, ethnic, religious, and other determinants. Of the nation's estimated 7.6 million residents, somewhat more than one-half were identified as Indians, less than one-half ladino (see Glossary). There were in addition a few Black Caribs, a smaller number of Europeans, and an even smaller community of Asians (see Regional and Ethnic Diversity, ch. 2). A small elite—composed almost exclusively of ladinos and Europeans (a term that includes North Americans)—controlled great wealth, while the vast majority lived in varying degrees of poverty, which was defined by significant malnutrition, general illiteracy, and limited access to medical services. Almost all Indians lived in such conditions, as did many ladinos. The small middle class included a few Indians but consisted mostly of ladinos.

The key division is ethnic, between Mayan-speaking Indians and Hispanicized, Spanish-speaking ladinos. An Indian who leaves his or her community, learns and speaks Spanish, adopts Spanish dress, and abandons Indian customs will be accepted as a ladino. Another division is between Roman Catholics and Protestants. Until about the 1930s the society was preponderantly Roman Catholic, albeit interlaced with traditional beliefs among the Indians (see Indigenous Belief Systems, ch. 2). In common with Latin American societies, however, relatively few Guatemalans joined the priesthood; in the mid-1970s, for example, there were only about 500 priests in the country—roughly one priest to nearly 8,900 parishioners—and about 400 were foreigners (see Roman Catholicism, ch. 2). Although the hierarchy of the church remained socially and politically conservative, the foreign priests became active in social and economic matters, particularly in the rural, mostly Indian regions. Their activities provoked the enmity and suspicion of many members of the elite, who tended to categorize the priests and other religious as leftists and Marxists. During the late 1970s and early 1980s several of the Catholic priests, brothers, and nuns were killed, and many fled—or were forced to leave—the country.

Until the 1970s the Protestant community was not large and consisted mostly of small congregations of mainline churches. In the aftermath of the 1976 earthquake, however, there was a sharp increase in the number of converts. By 1983 the Protestants claimed over 20 percent of the population, and almost all were members of evangelical sects based in the United States. The most prominent convert to Protestantism was Ríos Montt, whose brother was a Roman Catholic bishop, and his fervent proselytizing was a source of anger and concern to many of his military colleagues as well as to the Roman Catholic hierarchy.

The other major division within the society was economic. The small elite garnered a significant portion of the national income, while the majority subsisted on a few hundred dollars a year. The government historically has taken a minor role in the economy; except for a brief period in the late 1940s and early 1950s during the presidencies of Arévalo and Arbenz, government policy has reflected classical notions of *laissez-faire* (see *Role of Government*, ch. 3).

The nation's wealth remained centered on the agriculture sector, which employed over one-half the work force but contributed only about one-fourth of the gross domestic product (GDP—see *Glossary*). Most of the value of agricultural output came from commercial crops for export, such as coffee, produced by a small number of large estates (see *Cropping Patterns and Production*, ch. 3). Although industry underwent significant development in the 1950-80 period, it contributed less than one-fifth of GDP in the early 1980s and remained at an early stage of development (see *Industry*, ch. 3). One clear indicator that most of the population was not involved in the modern sector was that in the late 1970s Guatemala's per capita commercial energy consumption was significantly below the average of other Central American economies and less than one-half that of Panama.

The society continues to be afflicted with an extremely high rate of illiteracy. In the mid-1970s an estimated 50 percent of all adults could neither read nor write Spanish, and roughly 70 percent of the agricultural workers and 35 percent of all industrial workers were illiterate. An estimated 80 percent of all Indians—most of whom were rural dwellers, poor, and nonnative speakers of Spanish—were illiterate (see *Education*, ch. 2).

The low rate of literacy posed a continuing problem to the nation's armed and police forces. In early 1983 the total strength of the armed forces was about 29,000; army, 27,000; air force, 650; and navy, 960. (The air force and navy were integrated parts of the Guatemalan Army, but they enjoyed considerable autonomy.) Most members of the air force and navy were career service personnel, but from 20 to 25 percent of the army strength was made up of conscripts (see *Personnel*, ch. 5). The conscripts, some of whom have in effect been secured through press-gang methods, were selected, examined, and inducted during one of four such campaigns a year. They required intensive language training in addition to basic military training.

The officer corps—a closely knit body that constitutes almost a caste within the society—has traditionally limited the functions and importance of noncommissioned officers (NCOs). In the 1960s and 1970s, however, the army increased its efforts to retain promising NCOs by increasing their pay scales, providing advanced training, and offering various perquisites.

Most officers on active duty in 1983 were graduates of the Escuela Politécnica, which was founded in 1873 (see Training, ch. 5). On graduation from the military academy each young officer forms two links that remain of vital importance throughout his life: the *promoción* (meaning in this context the graduating class) and the *centenario* (centenary, in reference to the number assigned to each graduate). Members of a *promoción* are expected to maintain strong bonds of loyalty throughout their military careers and in retirement. The *centenario* is a more randomly formed bond of loyalty that is determined by each officer's number. Officer number 396 has been a protégé of number 296, and both will seek to guide the career of number 496 when he receives his commission. (Women neither serve in the officer corps nor are they conscripted or recruited to other ranks.)

From the 1800s to the mid-1900s the governments of the nation were dominated by four dictators: José Rafael Carrera (1837-65), Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-85), Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920), and Jorge Ubico (1931-44). Each relied on the armed forces for support and cultivated the officer corps. The officer corps traditionally was one of four powerful interest groups, the others being the Catholic Church, the large landowners, and foreign companies doing business in Guatemala, such as the United Fruit Company. After the overthrow of President Arbenz in 1954, the army became the dominant force in politics and remained so in late 1983. Looking toward the future, many observers believed that General Mejía and his associates intend to comply with the schedule established for the constituent assembly elections, the convening and work of that assembly, and the eventual election of a president, who presumably will be a civilian, albeit possibly a newly retired officer. Those observers opined that the senior officer corps had concluded from its own experience and from the difficulties that military governments have confronted in several Central and South American nations that the institutional well-being of the army suffers severely from prolonged exposure as the governing body. These observers therefore predicted that the army will "return to barracks," but they did not expect them to submit to civilian control. They foresaw the officer corps removing itself from center stage but retaining an offstage decisionmaking role over all the other players and the plot.

October 14, 1983

An indication of the difficulties inherent in attempting to forecast or interpret events within the military high command came on October 21, when General Mejía unexpectedly relieved General López Fuentes from his position as chief of the national defense general staff and assigned him to Italy as the nation's ambassador. Colonel Rodolfo Lobos Zamora, formerly the commander of the Mariscal Zavala brigade in the capital, replaced López Fuentes. The official explanation stated that the changes in personnel were straightforward military matters and were devoid of any political significance. Unofficial conjectures as to the true reason for the transfer of López Fuentes, however, included assertions that a large number of army colonels had lost confidence in him and had demanded that he be replaced, that Mejía had become concerned over López Fuentes' reputedly close ties to the MLN, or that López Fuentes had engineered his transfer so that as a retired military officer he would be eligible to stand for election to the presidency in 1985, presumably as the candidate of the MLN.

Richard F. Nyrop

October 31, 1983

## Chapter 1. Historical Setting



*Effigy whistle, late classic, circa A.D. 600-900, from Nebaj*

THE HISTORY OF GUATEMALA is a tale of two societies in which more than one-half the people still lived within the Indian culture in the 1980s. It is also a tale of intermittent conflict, insurgency, and retaliation first brought about by patterns of Spanish conquest over four and one-half centuries ago. The Spaniards and the Indians did not live in separate worlds, but neither have their cultures successfully fused. Modern Guatemala remained characterized by the legacies of the unintegrated and unequal development of these two societies.

As in other parts of the New World, the central feature of Spanish settlement was the establishment of large landed estates and various systems of forced Indian labor for cultivating them. During the three centuries of the colonial period, these estates slowly spread along the fertile mountain valleys and across the more level stretches of the upland plateaus.

The land tenure patterns in Guatemala have been and remain among the most unequal in Latin America. The lot of the Indian peasant has improved only marginally since the pattern of Spanish settlement was crystallized in the seventeenth century. Relationships between landholders and tenants or itinerant wage laborers have been exploitive, and reform efforts have been vigorously resisted by those holding effective political and economic power. It was not until the decade between 1944 and 1954 that the first concerted effort was made by the government to reconstruct economic relationships to the benefit of workers and peasants.

For several centuries a center of Mayan culture, one of the most advanced pre-Columbian civilizations of the New World, the area that is now Guatemala became the seat of Spanish government for all of Central America. After independence it was initially the seat of the short-lived Federation of Central America.

From the mid-nineteenth century to the mid-twentieth, Guatemalan politics was dominated by a succession of four caudillos (dictators). The first of these, José Rafael Carrera, an illiterate peasant who was rigorously Roman Catholic and a political reactionary, rose to power in 1837—two years before the collapse of the Central American federation—and continued to be the dominant figure in Guatemalan politics until his death in 1865.

The second caudillo, Justo Rufino Barrios, whose regime lasted from 1873 to 1885, was known to many as the "Great Reformer." He stripped the Catholic church of many privileges, began an extensive public works program, introduced electricity in the capital, extended railroad lines, and established a national school system and a civil code. He also abolished the Indian communal landholding system and introduced private property rights into the Indian villages.

The dictatorship of Manuel Estrada Cabrera (1898-1920) was notable for its corruption and its favoritism toward the privileged classes and



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

foreign capital. Dictatorial rule was resumed in 1931 with the accession to power of Jorge Ubico. He refilled the treasury coffers, balanced the budget, restored the nation's international credit, and built more roads and hospitals than all of his predecessors combined. He also executed or exiled his potential enemies.

Ruling through repression in favor of the economic elite, Ubico, described as a policeman at heart, set the stage for what he dreaded most: rebellion and dramatic social change. An opposition movement begun by university students was ultimately joined by professionals, urban workers, and others, and the incessant clamor in the streets led to Ubico's resignation in 1944. An election later that year produced a resounding victory for a distinguished scholar and reformist, Juan José Arévalo.

Arévalo's term was characterized by the beginnings of economic planning, the extension of labor rights, and the establishment of a social welfare system. But it was his successor, Colonel Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán, elected in 1950, who succeeded in extending social reforms to the rural sector. His agrarian reform law of 1952 was hardly radical by modern international standards; but it was radical in the Guatemalan context, and it was offensive, in particular, to the United Fruit Company—the largest landowner in the country. Between 1949 and 1954 communist influence, especially in the capital and the fertile farming region of Escuintla, slowly but steadily increased. Guatemalan workers, hitherto unorganized and powerless, responded with alacrity to the leadership of communist union organizers. Although Arbenz almost certainly was not a communist and appointed no communist to either cabinet or subcabinet posts, he did allow communists a relatively free hand in labor relations and state education. The United Fruit Company categorized Arbenz' reform measures as communist, and by late 1953 senior United States officials were publicly asserting that Arbenz was a communist and privately seeking his overthrow.

In 1954 a small invasion force, which had been organized and financed by the United States Central Intelligence Agency, entered the country. Because the Guatemalan Army refused to fight, Arbenz resigned and soon thereafter went into exile. The subsequent counter-revolutionary regime rolled back many of the reforms of the previous decade. Most of the land that had been distributed to Indian peasants was returned to ladino estate owners, and labor and student groups and reformist political parties were systematically repressed.

As of mid-1983 all but one of the governments since the counter-revolution of 1954 had been headed by military men, and the one civilian allowed to serve a term, in the 1960s, was kept on a short leash. These governments created and maintained a vacuum in the political center by eliminating, often by assassination, leaders not only of left-wing and communist groups but also of moderately reformist parties, along with labor leaders, intellectuals, Catholic clergy, and other reform-minded individuals. A counterinsurgency campaign in the mid-1960s that was directed against a few hundred guerrillas in

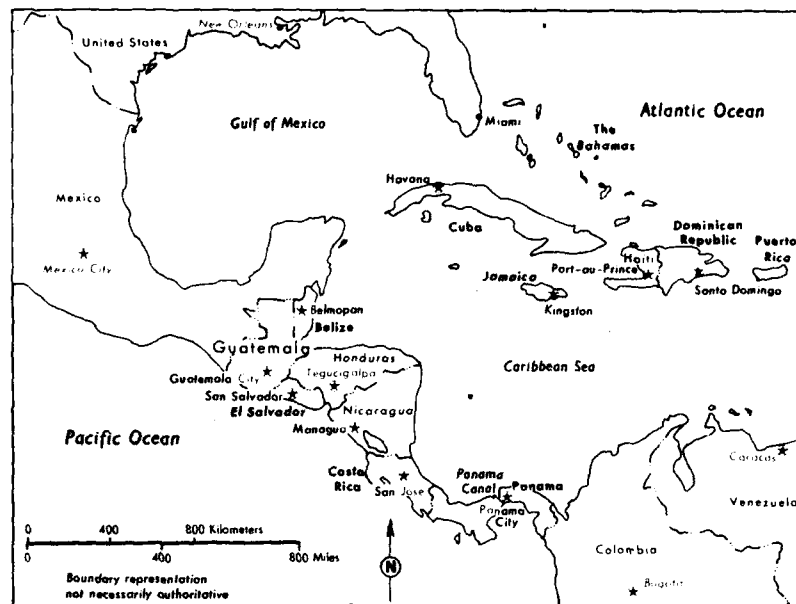


Figure 2. Middle America, 1983

the rural areas resulted in the deaths of several thousand Indian peasants as well. Renewed cycles of insurgency and counterinsurgency continued to plague the society in the late 1970s and early 1980s.

### Preconquest Guatemala

The present-day boundaries of Guatemala date only from 1838. During the colonial period and the early days of independence, the captaincy general of Guatemala consisted of the present-day republics of Central America—Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica—plus the present-day Mexican state of Chiapas (see fig. 1; fig. 2).

What is today Guatemala contained within its borders major centers of the pre-Columbian Mayan civilization, although the Mayan culture area extended into present-day Honduras, Chiapas, and Yucatán in southeast Mexico. Presumably the first inhabitants of the region were nomadic hunters; archaeological evidence of permanent settlement dates from the second millennium B.C. Settlements from that era have been excavated on the outskirts of present-day Guatemala City, in the country's Highlands, and in the hot rain forest area of northern Guatemala known as the Petén.

Although the earliest permanent settlements seem to have been in the Highlands, the most notable achievements of classic Mayan culture are to be found in the lowland areas. The so-called Old Empire, or classical period, which flowered in the first five or six centuries A.D.

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

(though a minority of scholars place it 250 years later), was notable especially for its architecture, mathematics, and astronomy. Attempts to decipher the Mayan chronology traditionally depended on translations of the calendric symbols found in the Mayan ruins and on clues provided by Bishop Diego de Landa of Yucatán in the sixteenth century. The various readings of the symbols, however, do not coincide. In the 1930s the Spinden and Makemson system, which placed the beginnings of the Mayan classic, or golden, age at A.D. 68, was the most popular. In the 1940s a system called the Goodman-Martinez-Thompson calendar, which moved the date 250 years ahead to A.D. 317, became dominant. A more recent method of establishing the chronology uses radioactive carbon tests that confirm the ages of wood found in Mayan artifacts. These tests, which are increasingly being accepted, strongly favor the Spinden and Makemson calendar.

The Mayans did not develop a phonetic alphabet; they used instead only a limited system of hieroglyphics. Their number system was vigesimal rather than decimal (that is, based on the number 20 rather than 10) and lent itself to facile representation and manipulation. It was certainly more efficient than its Roman contemporary. The annual calendar was based on 18 months of 20 days each, with an extra five-day holiday period; the Mayans had made exact calculations, however, showing that the solar year is fractionally longer than 365 days. Their precise astronomical calculations enabled them to predict solar eclipses. Some observers assert that the ancient Mayan calendar is still in use in some rural areas of the country.

The ancient Mayan economy employed neither beasts of burden, metal tools, nor the wheel. Society was rigorously theocratic; only the ruling priestly class and their servants lived in the cities, which were the religious centers, and plots of farmland were owned by clans and families rather than individuals. Human sacrifices were used in the religion, and there were probably slaves—prisoners taken in the wars that went on among the various cities and states.

For reasons that remain obscure, the Mayan civilization of the Old Empire declined. Cities were abandoned. Various causes have been suggested—disease, political revolution, war, the exhaustion of the soil—but they remain speculative. In later centuries neoclassical Mayan culture flourished in northern Yucatán; this culture was not pure Mayan, however, but showed influences from central Mexico. Meanwhile, invaders from Mexico penetrated and conquered the Guatemalan Highlands and intermarried with the local residents. Although one of these invading groups from Mexico, the Quiché, was for a time dominant in much of the Highlands, by the time the Spaniards arrived the various political entities in the Highlands were in a state of continuous war with each other. The Spaniards and their Mexican allies were at first regarded not as a threat by some city-states but rather as allies in these internecine wars, and it was not until the Spanish presence was well established that the Indians realized the danger that the Spaniards represented.

### Conquest and Early Settlement

In 1522 Pedro de Alvarado, the Spanish authority in the southwest Mexican province of Oaxaca, sent agents to scout out Guatemala. In 1523 Hernán Cortés, the viceroy of New Spain, sent Alvarado to conquer the region. Various authors disagree on the number of troops commanded by Alvarado; the number of Spaniards cited varies between 300 and 450, while their Mexican auxiliaries are variously estimated at 200 to "several thousand."

Although the Spaniards and their allies were considerably outnumbered by the local armies they faced, the superiority conferred by their horses and firearms gave them easy victories. Combining military superiority with a diplomacy consisting principally of treachery and ruthless cruelty, Alvarado soon subdued the native inhabitants of the region. The initial conquest was concluded by July 1524, and Alvarado established a capital, which he called Santiago de los Caballeros. The capital, still retaining that name, was moved twice. The second site is known today as Ciudad Vieja, the third one, as Antigua Guatemala. The capital remained at Antigua Guatemala until it was leveled by an earthquake in 1773, whereupon present-day Guatemala City was built a short distance to the east.

The Indians were still not completely subdued, however, and a series of revolts and pacification campaigns ensued. Alvarado was distracted by political maneuvers to get himself named *adelantado*, governor, of Guatemala, which necessitated visits to Mexico and Spain. Things were handled badly by one or another of his brothers, left in charge during his absences, who were excessively zealous in enslaving the Indians. They also tried to accumulate supplies of gold and engaged in illegal traffic in land titles. Alvarado himself passed a time in Cortés' jail, accused of financial irregularities. Finally, at the end of 1527, King Charles V made Alvarado governor and captain general of Guatemala, holding the rank of *adelantado*. Alvarado served only intermittently as governor, frequently taking time off to engage in adventures designed to bring him greater wealth and fame, most of which ended badly. He finally met his end in battle in Mexico in 1541.

By 1527 Spanish rule in Guatemala and El Salvador was secure except for the province of Tezulutlán, whose inhabitants were called Rabinal. Guatemala was a captaincy general with its own governor, although it was still subordinate to the viceroyalty of New Spain. At first the territory of Guatemala included present-day El Salvador but not the other Central American provinces. Nicaragua was ruled from Panama, and Honduras from Hispaniola. In 1544, however, all of Central America, from Panama north through the present-day Mexican states of Chiapas, Yucatán, and Tabasco, was constituted as an *audiencia* (see Glossary), with its capital at Gracias in Honduras. In 1549 the capital was moved to Santiago de los Caballeros, the site of present-day Antigua Guatemala.

Initially, the conquering Spanish soldiers were allotted *encomiendas* (tracts of land) together with numbers of Indian laborers. Under the

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

*encomienda* system, the owners (*encomenderos*) were given the labor of the Indians and effective control over their lives in return for the guardianship of their souls, that is, they undertook to convert the Indians and to maintain the forms of Christian worship among them. Under the New Laws of 1542 (actually promulgated on May 1, 1543), no further *encomiendas* were to be given, although those already existing would be maintained. Indians who had already been enslaved would remain slaves, but no Indians thenceforth would be enslaved. Indians were to be considered vassals of the king of Spain. They were to have the legal rights granted to any individual and could not be forced to labor against their will. These laws were neither rigorously observed nor enforced. Nevertheless, they represented a remarkable victory for the belief that the Indian was a human being with a soul and human rights.

This was the view that had been urged by the great Dominican priest Bartolomé de Las Casas in his published treatise "*De Unico Vocationis Modo*" and in his book *Brevisima relación de la destrucción de las Indias*, an exposé of outrages committed against the Indians in the course of the conquest. Las Casas, who was appointed bishop of Chiapas in 1536, accepted the challenge to prove his nonviolent methods in practice, and the Dominicans undertook the peaceful conversion of the Rabinal, an Indian people who had defeated successive Spanish attempts at conquest. Preaching the gospel in the language of the Indians, the Dominicans made good their undertaking to convert the Rabinal within five years and to bring them peacefully under Spanish authority. In recognition of this extraordinary accomplishment, the area they inhabited, Tezulutlán, was renamed Verapaz, meaning "true peace."

Indians who had not been enslaved or assigned to *encomiendas* before the New Laws were promulgated were resettled in villages where they were liable to tribute and were expected to attend Christian services but were otherwise left to rule themselves. Nevertheless, the Indians later revolted and killed the Spanish friars, and this in turn prompted another conquest. A series of administrative changes culminated in 1570 with the establishment of a new *audiencia* of Guatemala, the territory of which was decreased by the subtraction of Panama to the south and Tabasco and Yucatán to the north. That is, it covered present-day Central America plus the present-day Mexican state of Chiapas.

## **The Colonial Period**

### **Government**

The five-man *audiencia* was the highest governmental authority. The president of the *audiencia* during most of the colonial period held the additional titles of governor and captain general, thus combining administrative, judicial, and military authority. He was appointed by the king and was responsible to him; in fact, the colony was sometimes referred to as the kingdom of Guatemala.

The territory of the *audiencia* was divided into provinces for administrative purposes. The number of these was changed from time to time, but for most of the colonial period there were 15. The leading official in each province was called *corregidor*, where the provincial population was predominantly Indian, and *alcalde mayor* and sometimes *gobernador*, in provinces where there was substantial Spanish settlement. A province ruled by a *gobernador* was one in which the government and administrative structure had been established early in the conquest, i.e., before the creation of the newer administrative structure, which coincided with the establishment of the *audiencia*.

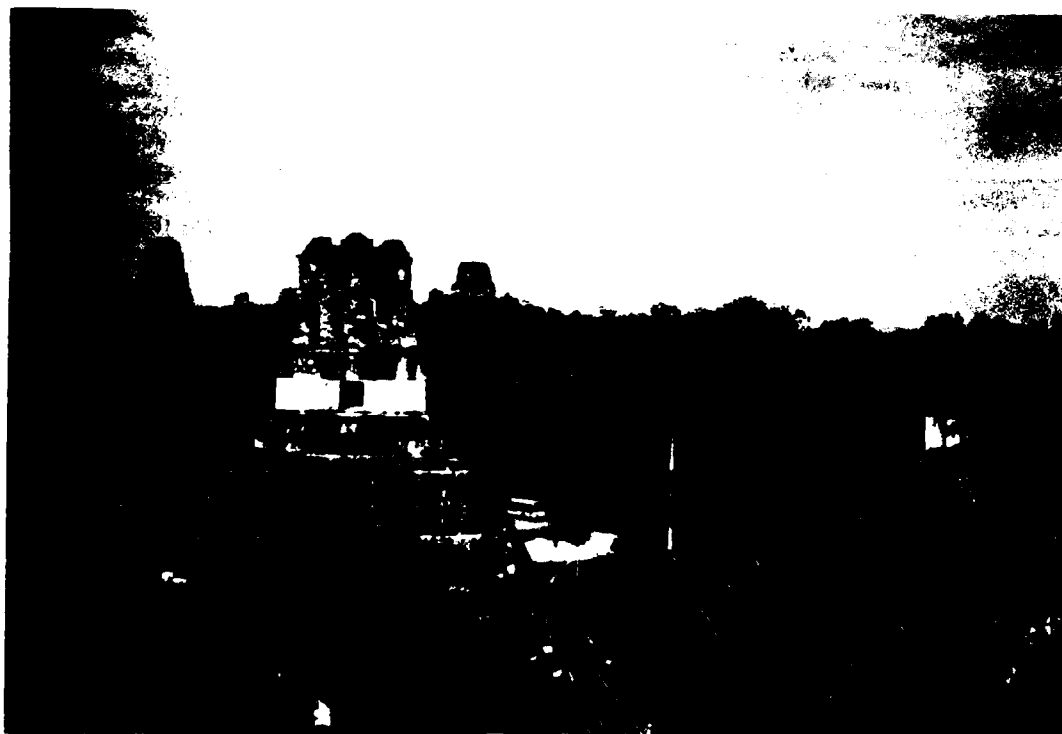
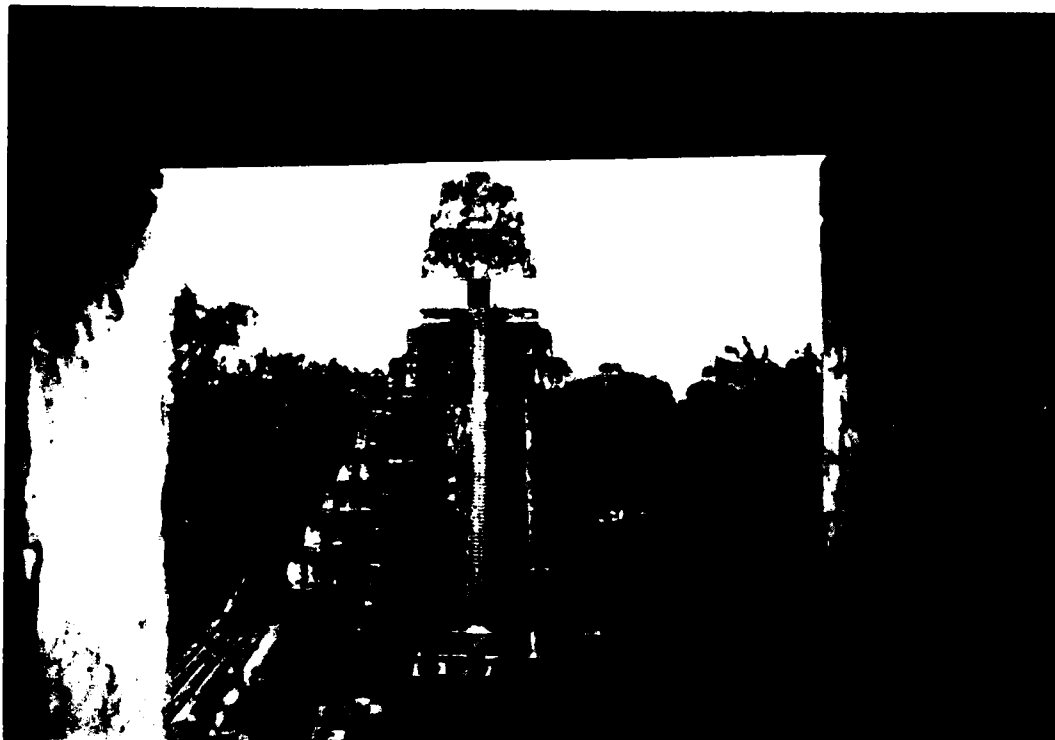
The local level of government consisted of the township, that is, an urban settlement, either Spanish or Indian, with its surrounding rural area. The local government, generally known as the *cabildo* or *ayuntamiento*, consisted of a council of *regidores* (councilmen), the number of whom varied between two and 12, in proportion to the size of the town. The *regidores* appointed *alcaldes* (magistrates), and *aguaciles* (constables). The *regidores* were originally chosen by vote of the town's property owners, but over time *regidores* developed various ways of perpetuating themselves in office or of controlling the succession. The office was generally monopolized by the leading families and at times was even bought from the crown.

#### Education, Religion, and Culture

Although Las Casas is better known, the contribution of the first bishop of Guatemala, Francisco Marroquín, was also considerable. Marroquín was responsible for establishing the first schools in the colony, which were run by Dominicans. He founded schools not only for educating Indian and Spanish children but also for training priests. The local Indian languages were taught, as was theology. In 1548 the crown authorized the establishment of an institution of higher learning in the colony, which was actually established in 1556 at the Dominican monastery. The Jesuits began their own college in 1615.

A full-scale university, the University of San Carlos, was authorized in 1680 and founded in 1681. Marroquín had left money and land in his will for the founding of the university, though it was not established until long after his death in 1563. It was given the same rank as the universities of Mexico and of San Marcos in Peru and offered courses in philosophy, theology, law, and medicine. Over the whole of the colonial period, it granted 2,415 degrees, including 206 doctorates. Only those of pure Spanish blood who attested their devout Catholicism were allowed entry into the university.

The university contributed to an active intellectual life in the colony and toward the end of the colonial period showed that it was open to new intellectual currents in philosophy, medicine, and the experimental sciences. For example, the university prevented a smallpox epidemic in 1804 by the large-scale vaccination of the inhabitants of Guatemala City, only six years after the vaccine process was discovered in England.





*Classic Mayan site, at Tikal, Petén  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph and Kathryn R. Stafford*



## Guatemala: A Country Study

The dominant religious orders in the early colony were the Dominicans, Franciscans, and Mercedarians, although the Jesuits and Augustinians later became active. The orders did great work in founding schools, hospitals, orphanages, and asylums, and many religious carried on the work of Las Casas and Marroquín in attempting to protect the Indians from the depredations of the settlers. At the same time, the religious orders did well by doing good, accumulating substantial land-holdings as a result of being beneficiaries in the wills of the faithful and by acquiring the fruits of the labor of Indians who worked the tax-exempt church lands. As the colonial era progressed, the church became characterized less by the self-sacrificing good works of the early missionaries and more by the desire to protect and maintain the property given to it.

The monarchy under Philip II had assumed the so-called royal patronage, which gave the monarch control over the appointment of bishops, and the church certainly inculcated loyalty to the crown along with religious faith. Nevertheless, the exemption of lands held by religious orders from taxation became a grievance to the colonial government as those lands grew in extent; in addition, friction arose over the right of the clergy to be tried only in their own courts. In 1717 the crown decreed that no new monasteries or convents could be created in the Americas. In 1767 the monarch ordered the expulsion of the Jesuits from the New World and confiscated the property of the order, which was considerable.

The church had been successful in converting the Indians partly because it allowed the assimilation of some of the older Indian gods into the ranks of Christian saints, identifying them with saints who shared similar attributes or whose feast days coincided with the celebration of the traditional god. There thus developed a syncretic folk Catholicism, deeply believed in but of dubious orthodoxy, focusing on prayer and hopes of miraculous intervention but weak in its moral guidance of behavior (see *Indigenous Belief Systems*, ch. 2).

The intellectual life of Guatemala during the colonial period was substantial and was not centered exclusively in either the church or the university. Important work was done especially in linguistics and in the writing of history and poetry. It was on his hacienda in Guatemala that the old soldier Bernal Díaz del Castillo wrote his great history of the conquest in which he had taken part alongside Cortés. The work, *Verdadera historia de la conquista de Nueva España*, was completed in 1568 although not published until 1632. Other important histories were written by Antonio de Remesal, Francisco Vázquez, Francisco Jiménez, Francisco Antonio de Fuentes y Guzmán, and Domingo Juarros.

Unorthodox thinking, however, was risky in colonial Guatemala. The Inquisition came to Central America in 1572 to begin its terrible work among the non-Indian population. In 1573 it claimed its first victims: six men were imprisoned and one, a Frenchman, was burned at the stake as a heretic.

### *Historical Setting*

The Inquisition functioned in Guatemala until 1813, over 240 years. At first, investigations concentrated on Portuguese Jews, bigamists, and monks who had fallen away from the true faith. Subsequently, the focus of interest changed, and during the eighteenth century, while continuing to investigate cases of polygamy and secret Judaism, the inquisitors also became involved in investigating crimes against the state, witchcraft, blasphemy, and sacrilege. The offenses most frequently investigated, however, were of priests using the confessional to solicit sexual favors. The Inquisition also prohibited the importation into Guatemala or the publication of a vast number of books, not only novels and anticlerical tracts but also many histories, such as books dealing with ancient Greece, and even texts on economics.

### **The Colonial Economy**

The basic food items in colonial Guatemala were corn and beans, as they had been before the arrival of the Spaniards. These had been supplemented in the Indian diet by a wide variety of fruits and vegetables, small game animals, and domesticated turkeys. To this the Spaniards added wheat, rice, sugarcane, many European fruits and vegetables hitherto unknown in the New World, and various domesticated animals. The preconquest crops of cotton and tobacco were produced in greater quantity, and bees were raised for honey. Leading exports during most of the colonial period were cacao and indigo, a vegetable dye. Other vegetable and forest products were exported in smaller quantities as dyes or for medicinal and industrial use.

In keeping with mercantilist theory, the crown sought to maintain strict regulation of foreign trade. Trade with the colonies as a whole was controlled by the Casa de Contratación in Seville, which was the only port legally authorized for use in shipping to and from the Americas. Some products were traded only for the benefit of the crown; others were monopolized by specific guilds. The production of some items was specifically forbidden in the colonies so that they would not compete with the products of the mother country—for example, flax, wine, and mulberry trees for the raising of silkworms.

Under the mercantilist system the colonial economy stagnated, providing an appropriate substructure for a static social order. Indians worked their own communal lands or lands of the haciendas at more or less a subsistence level. A small class of artisans—working in silver, wood, stone, and iron—made household utensils, building materials, and furniture. At the top of the system, the great landowners produced cacao and indigo or raised cattle. A few, intermarried, leading families monopolized power in the name of Spain, holding both office and titles of nobility. The dominant family, often called simply "the family," was the Fermín Aycinena clan. At the time of independence all 64 salaried public offices in the colonial administration were held by individuals related by blood or marriage.

Of course, there were substantial monetary incentives to violate the legal monopoly of trade, and a great deal of smuggling went on. Pirate raids were a continual problem for colonial administrations, starting

with French buccaneers in 1536. The Atlantic coast was molested more than the Pacific. The most famous of the raiders was Sir Francis Drake, who reputedly fathered a son during one of his raids into the country. Some Guatemalans today claim to be his descendants.

### **Central American Independence**

As the eighteenth century wore on, the ideas of the French Enlightenment penetrated Guatemala. The monthly *Gaceta de Guatemala*, published from 1729 to 1816, became more liberal and somewhat anticlerical under the editorship of Simón Bergaño y Villegas from 1804 to 1807. Although the *Gaceta* ceased publication in 1816, its role was taken up by the even more radical *El Editor Constitucional* and *El Amigo de la Patria*, both of which began publication in 1820. The *Sociedad económica de amigos del País* (Economic Society of the Friends of the Country), functioning between 1796 and 1799, served as a forum for discussion of colonial problems.

The growing liberal movement based itself on interests as well as ideas. Although a conservative faction was strong—based on royal officeholders and the merchants-consul, who were authorized to act as agents of the trade monopoly between Spain and the colonies—the growing liberal movement was supported not only by urban professionals and intellectuals but also by agriculturists and merchants excluded from the trade monopoly who would stand to benefit from the liberalization of trade. The liberal movement was backed especially by the society of indigo growers and even by the influential Fermin Aycinena family.

Independence came eventually as the outcome of a confused period of turmoil that began in 1808, when Napoleon occupied Spain and placed his brother Joseph on the throne. The colonists of Guatemala, like those elsewhere in the Americas, were suddenly faced with questions of legitimacy. Like the colonists elsewhere, they rejected the authority of Bonaparte and sent a representative to the loyal parliament (*cortés*) that met in Cádiz. The parliament, grateful to the colonies for their loyalty and attempting to reinforce their support for the Bourbon cause, granted them greater local authority, freer trade, and representation in future governments of Spain.

The hopes and expectations of greater freedom aroused by the acts of the parliament were frustrated, however, by the arrival in 1811 of a new president of the *audiencia*, José de Bustamante y Guerra, who feared that a liberal policy would loosen the ties of Central America to Spanish authority and therefore refused to recognize the liberal policies of the parliament. Repression increased with the restoration of Ferdinand VII to the throne of Spain in 1814. The liberal constitution of 1812 promulgated by the parliament was disavowed by the monarch; supporters of the parliament, including in Guatemala the Fermin Aycinena family, were persecuted, and the monarch even reestablished the Inquisition. In the mother country itself, however, those who had fought for the Bourbon monarchy against Napoleon were not willing

to accept that they had fought for oppression and not for liberty, and in 1820 a revolution in Spain restored the liberal constitution of 1812, which provided for freedom of the press, free trade, and free elections.

It was at this juncture that the news arrived in Guatemala City of Agustín de Iturbide's declaration of Mexican independence on April 10, 1821. Although the acting president of the *audiencia*, Gabino Gaínza, urged the Central Americans to remain loyal to Spain, local sentiment was predominantly in favor of independence. When the news arrived in September that the northern province of Chiapas had decided to join the Mexican independence movement, Gaínza called a meeting of the political and religious leaders in Guatemala City to decide on a course of action. Although the archbishop and some others opposed independence, Gaínza could see that majority sentiment favored it, and on September 15 Gaínza proclaimed independence, designating himself as president of the Federation of Central America (also called the United Provinces of Central America and the Central American Federation or Union). The Declaration of Independence was composed by José Cecilio del Valle, the editor of the liberal newspaper *El Amigo de la Patria* and the leading intellectual figure in the country.

For almost two years the actual constitutional situation was confused; varying currents of opinion favored independence for each province, independence for a united Central America, or independence in union with Mexico. El Salvador, uneasy about the prospect of being dominated by either Guatemala or Mexico, even voted to join the United States and sent a representative to Washington to see if it could be arranged. Iturbide proclaimed himself emperor of a domain extending all the way to Panama and sent troops to Central America under General Vicente Filisola to make good his claim. The Guatemalans acquiesced in this new situation, although there was resistance from El Salvador. Iturbide was unable to consolidate his rule, however, and abdicated in March 1823, leaving Central America to its own devices. Filisola summoned a Central American constituent assembly, which issued a second declaration of independence, on July 1, 1823, and drafted a federal constitution. The provinces were five—the present-day nations of Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica. Manuel José Arce of El Salvador was elected president, and Valle was a close second.

The constitution established a federal congress and senate but gave the five provinces their own legislative bodies and internal self-government. A president and vice president headed the federal executive, and a supreme court of justice was the highest judicial authority. Each province was also to have a chief, vice chief, and supreme court. A variety of civil rights were guaranteed, but the Catholic religion was made official; slavery was abolished.

Disputes soon arose, beginning with the third session of the congress in March 1826, as the Conservatives, who had lost out in the question of independence and the establishment of the federal system, tried to regain power. (In the context of nineteenth-century Central America,

the terms *Conservative* and *Liberal* defy precise definitions. Perhaps the closest equations are *proclerical* and *anticlerical*, respectively. In essence President Arce went over to the Conservatives, leading to conflict with the Liberal governments of El Salvador and Guatemala. Arce deposed the Guatemalan chief of state; the unfortunate vice chief who succeeded him was lynched by a mob, and power in Guatemala was then assumed by a Conservative. Intervention by Arce in Honduras was less successful, however, and his government was overthrown by a Liberal army led by Francisco Morazán, still regarded as the greatest Honduran hero. The Conservative leaders, including Arce, were sent into exile, along with the archbishop.

Morazán was elected president of the federation in 1830; he abolished church tithes, legalized civil marriage, and developed a system of public education. The federal capital was moved to San Salvador, a more reliably Liberal environment than Guatemala City. Valle finally won the elections of 1834, but he died right after the election, and Morazán accepted another term.

In Guatemala Pedro Molina, the Liberal editor of the periodical *El Editor Constitucional*, served as provisional chief from 1829 to 1830. After some turmoil the Guatemalan legislature elected as provincial chief of state Mariano Gálvez, who put through an enlightened Liberal program consonant with Morazán's, including the building of schools and roads, legalizing the equality of rights between legitimate and illegitimate children, instituting trial by jury, and abolishing the death penalty. Elected to a second term in 1835, Gálvez was overthrown in the Conservative counterrevolution of 1838.

Although Morazán was initially successful in inflicting defeat on the Conservative rebels, he was finally driven from the capital in March 1840 and went into exile. Two years later he returned to Central America, seizing control of the government of Costa Rica as a prelude to raising an army that he hoped would reconstitute a Liberal-dominated federation. He was defeated, however, and finally executed on September 15, 1842, the twenty-first anniversary of Central American independence, thus extinguishing the last possibility of maintaining a Central American Federation.

The Conservative victories of 1838 had been led by an illiterate mestizo, José Rafael Carrera, who was only 23 years old at the time. A religious fanatic of strong will and messianic aspirations, Carrera preached that the cholera epidemic that broke out in 1837 was a sign of God's displeasure with the anticlerical Liberal governments of Guatemala and of the Central American Federation. Supported by the Conservatives and especially the church, which hoped to regain the prerogatives taken from it by the Liberals, Carrera also aroused passionate support from much of the country's Indian population, who were incited by their priests. Defeated in his early battles with Morazán, Carrera persisted, overthrowing the Guatemalan provincial government in April 1838 and the federal government in 1840. After the Conservative triumph in Guatemala, the federal congress passed leg-

isolation allowing provinces to secede, which they did one by one. When Guatemala withdrew in March 1839, only El Salvador remained loyal to the federation.

### **Independent Guatemala: The Early Years**

The extraordinary Carrera, who only learned to write his name after becoming president, proved to be a brutal autocrat. Liberals were subject to all sorts of cruelties, and the president continually intervened militarily in the other countries of Central America to maintain or restore Conservative governments. By the end of his 27-year rule he had revoked all of the Liberal legislation of Morazán and Gálvez. Civil marriage was abolished, obligatory tithes to the church were reestablished, monasteries were restored, and in 1844 the Jesuits were welcomed back. In 1852 a concordat was signed with the Vatican, the first such agreement with one of the newly independent Spanish-speaking republics; Carrera was decorated by the pope for services to the faith.

In addition to his labors on behalf of the church, landowners, and Conservatives in the other republics, Carrera built roads, reduced the public debt, and attempted to diversify agriculture by introducing new crops. He reconquered the secessionist departments of Quezaltenango, Sololá, Huehuetenango, and San Marcos, which had seceded during the Morazán years to form the independent state of Los Altos. He participated in the joint Central American invasion of Nicaragua to overthrow William Walker, the North American filibuster who had seized control there. In 1859 Carrera signed a treaty with Britain, recognizing British sovereignty over neighboring Belize, to be known as British Honduras, in return for a commitment from the British to build a highway from Guatemala City through the Petén region to the Caribbean. In fact, the road was never built, and the Guatemalans, arguing that the British had not kept their side of the bargain, later reasserted their claim (see *Latin America*, ch. 4).

In 1854 Carrera was elected president for life and was authorized to designate his successor. Shortly before his death he named General Vicente Cerna, another authoritarian Conservative who, after being confirmed in office by a vote of the legislature, was inaugurated in May 1865. Cerna continued the policies of his predecessor and was elected for a second term in 1869, but he was overthrown by the Liberals in 1871, in the last of a series of attempted rebellions against the Cerna regime.

After the Liberal victory Miguel García Granados served as provisional president from 1871 to 1873, but he in effect shared power with Justo Rufino Barrios, who was elected to succeed him. Barrios served as president from 1873 until his death in 1885. The "Great Reformer," as he was known, had no problem securing his reelection by vote of a constituent assembly in 1876 and by popular vote in 1880 (the electorate at the time consisting of between 35,000 and 40,000 people, a tiny fraction of the national population). His domination of the country

was virtually absolute and would have lasted longer had he not died in battle, pursuing the chimera of Central American unification.

Apart from the doomed attempt to restore Central American unity, the main themes of the administration of Barrios were a staunch anticlericalism and a strenuous attempt to promote economic development. In both respects, Barrios was following established Liberal doctrine. Subsidiary themes of his administration were the expansion of public education and the remodeling of constitutional arrangements according to liberal principles. The constitution adopted under his influence, the country's third, lasted with only minor amendments for 66 years after its adoption in 1879, although it was more frequently honored in the breach than in the observance. The constitution guaranteed individual rights and liberties, separated church and state, and provided for popular election of the president, the unicameral legislature, and judges.

Barrios' anticlerical measures were far reaching. The Jesuits were expelled, and convents and monasteries were suppressed. Civil marriage was reinstituted and education taken out of the hands of the church. Priests were forbidden to teach or to wear clerical garb on the streets. Most important, church properties were expropriated; bishops who opposed the measures were exiled.

The expropriation and sale of church lands, as well as certain other measures of economic policy taken under Barrios, were related to major changes taking place in the economic and social structures. As the population grew, so did the urban middle class of merchants, professionals, and civil servants, some of mixed ancestry. Eager to acquire wealth, these growing middle-class elements were confronted with the fact that the basis of wealth in Guatemala was the ownership of land, and land either was retained by Indian villages or was monopolized by old landowning families and the church. The long-standing principle of Liberalism—anticlericalism—thus implied not only greater intellectual freedom but also access to lands and thus to wealth.

A second development of significance was the reorientation of Guatemala's exports. The leading exports up to and during the first half of the nineteenth century had been indigo and other dyes, such as cochineal. Thus, the invention in Europe of cheap chemical dyes undermined the country's principal source of wealth and called for a major shift in its agricultural patterns. Cattle continued to be important, but the export crops of the future appeared to be sugar, cotton, and coffee. Expanding markets for these products reflected the growth in population and in affluence in Western Europe and North America. The markets for the most promising new crop, coffee, were founded principally in the United States and Germany. The British tended to drink tea, and the French grew coffee in their tropical colonies.

The resulting promotion of coffee culture by the Barrios government had several significant social consequences. One was that the older landholding class was opened up to newer, urban-based elements, who were able to secure former church lands on easy terms. Another consequence was that numerous Germans emigrated to Guatemala to grow

coffee, especially in the province of Alta Verapaz. German families settled in the country and intermarried with Guatemalans, a process described by one Guatemalan writer as "putting a little milk in the coffee." By 1914 about half of all Guatemalan coffee was grown on German-owned lands, and Germany bought more than one-half of the country's production. During and after World War I, sales overseas had to be diversified; the proportion shipped to the United States increased gradually at first, but during the 1930s the United States became Guatemala's main market. The United States took 22 percent of Guatemala's coffee crop in 1934, 40 percent in 1935, and 60 percent in 1936.

The other major social change brought about by the expansion of coffee cultivation was the de facto reenslavement of the Indians. During the initial period of European occupation, Indians had been left with the less valued hillsides on which to grow their corn. Coffee grows best on hillsides, however, and the period of the expansion of coffee culture was also one of great dispossession of the Indians. This occurred in various ways. Laws expropriating church lands were sometimes applied against Indians who farmed lands owned by the church. A decree of 1877 provided for the sale of lands owned by local governments, much of which had been leased by Indians. Communally held lands were sold at auction. Sometimes Indians were dispossessed from ancestral lands deemed suitable for coffee culture and compensated with an equivalent area of unoccupied lowland.

Indians were disadvantaged not only by the loss of their land but also by harsh new labor laws that were designed to force them to work on the coffee plantations. In 1877 peonage for debt was legalized. Loans were extended to Indians, who were required by law to work off the loan with their labor. Low wage rates meant the Indian could not repay the original loan; in fact, he went deeper into debt because he had to borrow more to pay for his necessities. These debts were heritable, so that a new kind of serfdom was created. Moreover, a vagrancy law adopted in 1878 provided that the "unemployed" had to work 40 days a year on public works projects.

On the basis of these measures, Barrios was able to build up the country's economic infrastructure. Railroad lines were extended, and electricity was brought to Guatemala City, along with telegraph and telephone installations. Roads were built and ports improved. Unused land was opened up, and special incentives were given for the production not only of coffee but also of other export products, such as cotton, rice, quinine, rubber, cacao, and sarsaparilla. A national banking system was developed.

Education was a major emphasis of Barrios. He established the Ministry of Public Instruction and founded schools at all levels for children of both sexes and for Indians as well as ladinos (see Glossary). Public funds were not adequate, however, to enable him to meet his goal of universal, free, and compulsory schooling for all children between the ages of six and 14.



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

Taking up the cause of Central American union again in 1885, Barrios attempted to coerce the other, recalcitrant states of the former federation but was killed in battle in El Salvador shortly after organizing a unification army. After a brief interregnum Manuel Lisandro Barillas became provisional president and then was elected by the legislature to a six-year term. Barillas did not seek to extend his term of office, but he presided over a genuinely competitive election in which the great Liberal scholar Lorenzo Montúfar was defeated by Barrios' nephew, José María Reyna Barrios. Reyna Barrios ran a developmentalist Liberal regime in the tradition of his uncle, but he attempted to extend his term illegally by dissolving the legislature and establishing a dictatorship. Although Reyna Barrios put down a revolt against his coup, he was assassinated in February 1898 and was succeeded by Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who as minister of government was the "first designate" to succeed the president.

Elected to a six-year term in 1898, Estrada organized fraudulent reelections every six years and thereby remained in office until 1920. Although he continued the developmentalist policies of his predecessors, Estrada gradually became a repressive, corrupt, and mentally erratic dictator. Like his Mexican contemporary, Porfirio Díaz, Estrada believed in development on the basis of Indian labor and foreign investment. The expropriation of Indian communal lands on various extralegal pretexts continued. The Boston-based United Fruit Company established extensive banana plantations, having secured land on highly favorable terms. A company affiliated with United Fruit, International Railways of Central America (IRCA), greatly expanded the country's railroad network and penetrated into neighboring countries. The IRCA system included over 1,400 kilometers of track by 1930. Local officials cooperated with landowners in their enforcement of the debt peonage system, and Estrada ruled through a system of informers and political assassins.

Able-bodied males were made subject to conscription, and a large standing army was developed. Repeated assassination attempts and revolts were unsuccessful until 1920, when Estrada was deposed after bloody street fighting in Guatemala City. The opposition had managed to get a majority in the legislature to agree to the appointment of a committee of doctors to pass on the president's sanity; in a decision as much political as medical, the committee decided that Estrada was indeed insane.

### **The Ubico Era**

Carlos Herrera was elected provisional president and then organized his election to a six-year term. He was overthrown two months after his inauguration, however, and the ensuing election gave the presidency to General José María Orellana. During the presidencies of Orellana (1921-26) and his successor, Lázaro Chacón (1926-30), Guatemala enjoyed a rare respite of prosperity, democracy, and government competence. The currency was stabilized, and Guatemalan products

enjoyed good markets abroad. Labor unions were organized. The educational system was expanded, and libraries were built. The prison system was reformed to stress rehabilitation, and improvements in public health followed hospital construction and the establishment of a school for nurses. But this period of peace and prosperity proved to be an atypical interlude. Orellana died of a heart attack before completing his term. Chacón had to resign in 1930 after suffering a brain hemorrhage, dying soon after. But in any case, world prosperity came to an end at about the same time as the life of Chacón and, like many other countries, Guatemala was to find that dictatorships flourished in times of depression.

After several months of turmoil a presidential election held in January 1931 was won by Jorge Ubico, who had been defeated by Chacón in 1926. Ubico was a career military officer of upper class origin who had distinguished himself not only in border skirmishes but also as a governor, first of Alta Verapaz and then of Retalhuleu, where his administration was noted for its honesty, energy, and progressivism, especially in public health matters. Ubico was credited with wiping out yellow fever, at some personal danger to himself, and was awarded a gold medal by the Rockefeller Foundation for his efforts on behalf of public health. Although he had served under Estrada Cabrera, he had been appointed to the cabinet by Orellana.

Serving as president until 1944, Ubico combined an emphasis on honesty and fiscal orthodoxy with developmentalism of a traditional sort—based on exploitation of Indian labor and generous concessions to foreign investors—and with a ruthless repression of opposition. His methods consisted of the use of informers and censorship and the execution for sedition, at various times, of over 100 opponents of the regime, including civilian politicians, dissident army officers, students, and labor organizers. One comment that summarized the different aspects of the regime's policies was that Ubico ran a model jail.

The Ubico regime coincided with the world depression of the 1930s and World War II. Adopting classic pre-Keynesian financial policies, Ubico restricted credit, reduced public expenditures drastically, and cut bureaucratic salaries by 40 percent. As an attempt to secure honesty in the public service, Ubico introduced the so-called law of probity, which required public officials to make a declaration of their assets and liabilities before taking public office and again on leaving office. As orthodox financial theory required, the Guatemalan treasury showed a surplus for every year of Ubico's term. In the meantime, Ubico became one of the largest landowners in the country.

Development under Ubico consisted of the maintenance of infrastructure, such as roads and bridges; the provision of loans to landowners on easy terms; and the granting of extravagant concessions to foreign businesses. The United Fruit Company was granted exemption from import duties on raw materials (including food served in its commissaries) and from local property taxes. There was no limit on the remittance of profits; IRCA, part of a United Fruit empire that also

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

included a port, a shipping line, and a radio and telegraph company, received an annual government subsidy. Ubico abolished the notorious system of debt peonage, but in 1934 he introduced a vagrancy law that required all Indians, on pain of a jail sentence, to carry a passbook showing the number of days they had worked, which had to total 100 to 150 days a year. Ominously, the same year that the vagrancy law was passed, the Department of Labor was placed under the authority of the National Police.

It was not only American businesses that Ubico favored. As a result of his early days as military governor of Alta Verapaz, he was also close to the German coffee growers and received their strong support. Before the United States entered the war, Ubico allowed German submarines to refuel at Puerto Barrios. This closeness to German interests, as well as the dictatorial style of his government, might have put Ubico in a difficult position during World War II, but he soon assumed a strongly pro-United States posture. The United States was granted military bases and stationed troops in Guatemala during the war. German property was expropriated, and the dictator actually permitted the removal of some Germans, even Germans possessing Guatemalan citizenship, to internment camps in Texas. The United States Federal Bureau of Investigation was active in Guatemala in an attempt to prevent the use of Guatemalan territory by enemy agents. The Guatemalan treasury and central bank bought United States war bonds.

Despite this extraordinary display of loyalty to the Allied cause, it was clear that the principles on which the Ubico regime was based were diametrically opposed to those championed by the Allies. The Atlantic Charter, preparations for the founding of the United Nations (UN), and Allied prodemocratic propaganda had their effect in Guatemala, and discontent with the regime rose. It was further stimulated by the overthrow of the dictatorship in neighboring El Salvador in April 1944. The downfall of Ubico came about in classical fashion when the dictator escalated a conflict growing out of a student demonstration until most of the urban population turned against him. Students gathering to demand university autonomy were brutally repressed; a general sit-down strike ensued (the so-called *huelga de los brazos caídos*, the strike of the limp arms), and continued antiregime demonstrations forced Ubico to resign on July 1, 1944.

The dictator transferred power to an associate, Juan Federico Ponce Vaides, who attempted to rule in the same style as Ubico, but intensified popular resistance led to open fighting in October. Ponce was forced to resign and was replaced by a joint civil-military junta. Ponce and Ubico both went into exile; Ubico died in New Orleans in 1946.

### **The Abortive Revolution**

#### **The Arévalo Presidency**

The provisional revolutionary junta was composed of a civilian, Jorge Toriello, and two military officers who were to remain significant figures for some years in Guatemalan politics: Major Francisco Javier



*Ruins of the Convent of Santa Clara, Antigua Guatemala  
Courtesy Museum of Modern Latin American Art*

Arana and Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán. Army officers senior to Arbenz and Arana—some 80 generals—who had been supporters of Ubico at once left the country, and elections were scheduled for a constituent assembly and a president. A new constitution, which went into effect on March 13, 1945, reflected the progressivism of the era. The new constitution extended the suffrage to illiterate males and literate females; previously only literate males had voted. (At the time an estimated 76 percent of Guatemalan women were illiterate.) The president was to be elected for a single six-year term.

The new president, Juan José Arévalo, took office two days after the constitution went into effect. Winning 85 percent of the vote in a free election, Arévalo was to be only the second president in Guatemalan history to be freely elected, serve out a constitutional term, and turn over power to a freely elected successor (the other one had been Barillas). Arévalo's social democratic philosophy was in keeping with the spirit of the new constitution. A professor specializing in the philosophy of education, he had spent the exile imposed by Ubico teaching in universities in Argentina. His political doctrine was "spiritual socialism," as opposed to the materialist socialism of Marx.

The early years of Arévalo's term saw the implementation of long-overdue structural reforms. A social security system was established, and an economic development institute was founded. The new con-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

stitution had already abolished the vagrancy laws and other forms of forced labor. In 1947 a labor code was adopted that gave workers the right to strike and organize unions, stipulated equal pay for equal work, authorized the passing of minimum wage laws, and set up a system of labor courts to arbitrate grievances. The administration reoriented government spending so that one-third of the budget went to social welfare expenditures, including school and hospital construction, education, immunization and other health programs, and a national literacy campaign. The state had assumed ownership of numerous coffee plantations when those owned by Germans had been expropriated during the war. This provided some opportunity for experimentation with cooperatives, while legislation prohibited the eviction of renters of agricultural land who continued to make the stipulated payments. In addition, the government attempted to limit rates charged by the electricity monopoly and brought pressure on large foreign corporations to abide by the new labor legislation. Arévalo did not run an antibusiness or antilandowner administration, however. No attempt was made to expropriate private property or nationalize foreign-owned businesses, and the development institute and the newly created state Bank of Guatemala concentrated on lending to private businesses to promote diversification. A 1947 industrial promotion law gave incentives for private investment, and foreign investors were to be welcomed on the same terms as nationals.

Arévalo's general attitude was "developmentalist," similar to that of previous Liberal presidents. That is, he created incentives for the development of industry and the expansion of agricultural production without threatening the existing distribution of property. Arévalo did not attempt an agrarian reform. His program in agriculture stressed the provision of credit and technical assistance and the promotion of cooperatives. He also attempted a colonization program in the Petén.

Arévalo's last two years in power were spent primarily in attempting to complete his constitutional term without being overthrown. One coup attempt was led by a rightist military officer, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, and came in response to the assassination of Colonel Arana in July 1949.

Arana and Arbenz, the two military participants in the junta that had held elections after the overthrow of Ubico, were the leading candidates for the presidential election of 1950. Under Arévalo, Arana served as army chief of staff and Arbenz as minister of national defense; Arana was favored by the right, Arbenz by the left. When Arana was assassinated, suspicion attached to close supporters of Arbenz, but hard evidence was lacking, and no one was ever charged with the crime. The right wing finally selected Brigadier General (retired) Ydígoras Fuentes, a Ubico-era military officer and administrator, as its candidate, while moderate progressives supported Jorge García Granados, scion of one of Guatemala's old families, the distinguished drafter of the 1945 constitution, and a participant in the founding of the U.N.

### *Historical Setting*

Arbenz supporters included organized labor, peasants, students, and intellectuals, as well as the communists and other left-wing parties. The first Communist Party of Guatemala (Partido Comunista de Guatemala—PCG) was established in 1923; in 1924 this group joined the Communist International. This small group was generally ineffective throughout the 1920s and 1930s. In 1947 various Marxist groups formed an organization called the Democratic Vanguard (Vanguardia Democrática), but in 1949 the members changed the name to PCG. In 1951 the PCG merged with the Revolutionary Workers' Party of Guatemala. In 1952 the PCG, which had secured legal status the previous year, changed its name to Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo—PGT). In 1983 the party, illegal since 1954, retained that name.

### **The Arbenz Presidency**

Arbenz won the 1950 election easily, securing 65 percent of the popular vote. In his inaugural speech he stated his objectives as those of transforming Guatemala from a dependent nation having a semi-colonial economy to an economically independent country, replacing feudal arrangements with modern capitalism and raising general living standards. Clearly these objectives would not be easy to achieve, nor were they necessarily compatible with each other. The "transformation of the feudal system and the ending of economic dependency" implied a confrontation with the interlocking American corporations in the country—the United Fruit Company, the IRCA, and the Electric Company of Guatemala (Empresa Eléctrica de Guatemala—EEG), the power-generating company that was a subsidiary of the Electric Bond and Share Company, an American corporation.

In an effort to maintain the popular support with which he took office so that he could put through his program, Arbenz pursued a strategy of mass mobilization. He encouraged not only the participation of Indian peasants in an agrarian reform program but also the militancy of student and labor activists, who had been decisive in putting down the right-wing revolt against Arévalo after Arana's assassination.

Arbenz at first attempted to deal with the dominant foreign corporations by building competitive installations and thus challenging their monopoly position. A government-run hydroelectric plant would, it was hoped, force EEG to be competitive in the rates it charged; a highway from the capital to the Caribbean, parallel to IRCA's railroad lines, was designed to force the railroad company to lower its rates; and a new port on the Caribbean was proposed to compete with Puerto Barrios, which was largely owned by the United Fruit Company. Arbenz also began suits against the foreign corporations, alleging non-payment of back taxes and wages. In addition to their economic rationale, these policies appealed to Guatemalan national pride.

The major policy innovation of the Arbenz government, and that which constituted its principal claim to be considered a revolutionary government, was its land reform. As approved by the legislature on

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

June 17, 1952, however, the Law of Agrarian Reform was more progressive than revolutionary and was certainly not a communist measure.

The lands subject to redistribution were those publicly owned; those not farmed by the owner (that is, lands that were idle or were rented out), and/or property in excess of 90 hectares. Exceptions were provided for estates that were farmed in a modern and rational way. Some beneficiaries of the law would receive lands only on a lifetime lease—ownership remaining with the state—and would pay 3 percent annually of the value of the crop by way of rental. Others who received lands in outright ownership would pay 5 percent; they would come into ownership of the land after 25 years and be able to sell or mortgage it after that point, but not before.

Former owners of the land would be compensated in bonds maturing at various times up to 25 years and paying 3-percent annual interest. The most controversial aspect of the legislation was the proviso that the property valuation on which compensation would be paid would be the value declared for tax purposes, normally a small fraction of the actual market value of the land. This was one of the points that occasioned great protest by owners. Another was the provision that the land of those who opposed the law by violent or subversive means could be expropriated without compensation, a provision ostensibly designed to discourage armed resistance. The law ruled out landowners' appeals to the courts, however, and this was considered by some observers to be a violation of constitutional rights. Proponents of the law, pointing to Mexican experience, argued that otherwise large landholders would be able to defeat the purpose of the law by interminable litigation, which in effect would ensure that no lands would ever be distributed. Arbenz removed four judges of the Supreme Court after they suspended application of the law because of their doubts about its legal propriety.

Another feature of the law resented by landlords was the provision that the initial recommendations for expropriations of land be made by local-level committees of five members, two named by the government and three by the local peasant union. These committees would clearly be biased in favor of peasants and against landlords, although their recommendations would be subject to confirmation or rejection by officials of the newly established Department of Agrarian Affairs.

In addition to redistributing land, the government set up a national agrarian bank, which joined existing government banks in making loans to small farmers. From March 1953 to the overthrow of the Arbenz government at the end of June 1954, the bank loaned out the equivalent of over US\$11.9 million to small producers. Although exact figures are difficult to come by, partly because the succeeding government destroyed many of the records, it appears that a total of about 854,000 hectares became available for distribution and that about 100,000 peasant families were beneficiaries. Of the total of US\$10 million in bonds authorized to pay for the expropriation, by June 1954 the bank had

issued US\$7.9 million (see *Landownership and Agrarian Reform*, ch. 3).

The United Fruit Company was especially affected by the land reform, particularly because it only farmed about 15 percent of its holdings, leaving the rest as a reserve against the decline of fertility of the soil or the onset of banana diseases. Of the 220,000 hectares owned by United Fruit, about 160,000 hectares were expropriated, the land had a tax value of US\$610,000, but the company asserted in claims against the government that the true value of the land was US\$15.9 million. The government fixed the expropriation compensation at US\$1.2 million.

Arbenz also made political decisions that were labeled by some observers as being procommunist. In 1951 the government granted legal status to the communist party, and in the next election four party members were elected to the legislature. Party members remained few in number, but they were energetic and effective in organizing labor, students, and peasants. Moreover, their rhetoric was stridently anticapitalist and anti-United States.

During 1953 and 1954 the American press carried numerous articles that depicted Guatemala as a state either already under communist control or approaching that situation. Various articles and books published shortly after the collapse of the Arbenz government presented basically the same picture. Assertions were made, for example, that the communists had organized cells at every level of government and that in 1953 and 1954 over 30 plantations were seized by armed laborers.

Academic research in the intervening three decades has demonstrated that the reports of the 1950s reflected the cold war, not the situation in Guatemala. Peasants and armed laborers armed with hoes, machetes, and other primitive weapons did attempt to seize land, but they *not only* were unsuccessful but also were frequently repulsed and driven off by forces of the Arbenz government. The communists did establish a following of sorts among the previously unorganized and powerless laborers and no doubt created communist cells in various parts of the government, especially among teachers. But the small number of communist agitators did not need to teach or inculcate feelings of resentment against the United Fruit Company or the United States; those feelings were already present as a function of the society's history and recent experience.

### **Foreign Interests**

Throughout this period the United Fruit Company was seeking support from the government in Washington. The administration of Harry S. Truman sought to assist the company through diplomatic channels but with no apparent success. The administration of Dwight D. Eisenhower, who took office in January 1953, was more eager to help the company. John Foster Dulles, the new secretary of state, had as a private lawyer represented the company in negotiations with Gua-



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

temala in the 1930s: Allen Dulles, the new director of the Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), had for several years served on the board of directors of the United Fruit Company, as had the incoming assistant secretary of state for inter-American affairs, John Moors Cabot, whose brother was a former president of the company. In addition, Henry Cabot Lodge, the ambassador to the UN, was a stockholder in the company, and the husband of President Eisenhower's personal secretary was the company's public relations director.

In 1953 the new Eisenhower administration was in the process of intensifying and expanding the existing policy that was based on the "containment of communism." In the 1953-55 period Secretary of State Dulles engaged in negotiations that resulted in a series of treaties and pacts with countries in Western Europe, the Middle East and South Asia, and Southeast Asia. In addition, the political climate in the United States was such that reform movements abroad were viewed as suspect and dangerous, and any manifestation of anti-Americanism was condemned as communist inspired. The situation in Guatemala was exacerbated because there were in fact communists present who were playing with some success upon the people's grievances. For these and related reasons, the new administration convinced itself, although not its European allies, that a grave threat to Western Hemispheric security existed in Guatemala.

In August 1953 President Eisenhower approved the setting in motion of plans to depose Arbenz. In late June 1954 Arbenz took political asylum in the embassy of Mexico and shortly thereafter went into exile. Although several versions of the events of the intervening 10 months soon gained currency in Latin America and the United States, a detailed narrative was not available until the publication in 1982 of *Bitter Fruit*, a book written by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer. In addition to interviews with individuals who had direct knowledge of the events, the authors secured thousands of documents from several United States government agencies and bureaus.

The operation launched by the CIA under the code name Operation Success required, among other things, a Guatemalan to replace Arbenz. Ydígoras, who in 1958 was elected president, claimed that he was offered the post but refused. The CIA then decided on Colonel Castillo Armas, who had led an abortive uprising after the assassination of Arana and was, in exile, a bitter enemy of Arbenz.

During early 1954 the CIA organizers pulled together a ragtag group of exiles to serve as an "invading army" and created an air support force of aging World War II aircraft. The Guatemalan Air Force consisted of a few pre-1936 United States Army trainers. The new United States ambassador to Guatemala, John E. Peurifoy, not only gave tough private warnings to President Arbenz and his foreign minister, Toriello, but also issued public warnings of the danger of a communist takeover in Guatemala.

In early 1954 Arbenz apparently concluded that the army would not support him against an invading force—which it in fact did not—and

decided to seek weapons to create a popular militia. He ordered the weapons from Czechoslovakia, but the Guatemalan Army, alerted by CIA agents, intercepted the shipment at Puerto Barrios in May 1954. A few days later Secretary of State Dulles publicly decried the "Communist-type reign of terror" that existed in Guatemala.

On June 18, 1954, a C-47 flew over Guatemala City, bombing it with leaflets demanding that Arbenz resign and warning that a liberating army would soon invade the country. That night another old cargo plane flew over the city and machine-gunned various places. The next morning a P-47 strafed the airport. During the next few days the small force led by Colonel Castillo Armas had reached the city of Chiquimula. Ambassador Peurifoy intensified his contacts with the senior officers of Guatemala's armed forces, and on June 25 the military refused Arbenz' order to distribute arms to civilians to resist the invasion force. Over the next two days Peurifoy continued to negotiate with the army, and on June 27 President Arbenz made a radiobroadcast in which he announced that he was relinquishing the presidency to Colonel Carlos Enrique Díaz, the army chief of staff.

Peurifoy then faced the task of persuading Colonel Díaz and his associates to accept Castillo Armas as the new head of government. The final negotiations took place in San Salvador on July 1, and on July 3 Peurifoy flew the new government of Guatemala back to Guatemala City in a United States air attaché plane. On July 5 Castillo Armas formally became president, and on July 13 the United States granted diplomatic recognition to the government it had installed.

### **The Counterrevolution**

The counterrevolution led by Castillo Armas was thoroughgoing. He abrogated the 1945 constitution; a constituent assembly eventually drew up a new one that went into effect in March 1956. Castillo was "elected" president in a sort of plebiscite in which the voter had to declare orally to the election officials whether he was for or against Castillo's candidacy. The new constitution disenfranchised illiterates, which meant almost all Indians. Left-wing parties were outlawed, and a wide variety of political crimes were made punishable by death. In fact, many people were executed without benefit of trial, especially officials of the peasant unions and members of the local agrarian committees. The major thrust of the counterrevolution was to demobilize the Indian population and reestablish ladino hegemony.

The restrictions placed on foreign investment by the Arévalo and Arbenz governments were also removed. The land reform laws were annulled, and the expropriated land was returned to its former owners. In a public relations gesture, the United Fruit Company returned to the government 40,000 hectares of the expropriated land that had been given back to it. A new land law was enacted, and the new constitution gave various social guarantees, including the right to organize labor unions (see Landownership and Agrarian Reform, ch. 3). The tensions in Guatemalan society had not been relieved, however. Their main-

festations had merely been temporarily suppressed, only to reveal themselves even more strongly in the future, while the pattern established by the 1954 counterrevolution of attempting to hold back the tide of social change was to have drastic and far-reaching consequences in the years to come.

The victory for the right was also a victory for the proclerical position, and the Catholic church was rewarded for its support of the "Liberation" movement of Castillo Armas. Its right to own property, taken away by the Liberals in 1871, was restored, and it was exempted from property taxes. Religion was to be taught in the public schools, and the Catholic University was granted autonomy. For its part, the church resumed emphasizing those portions of Christian doctrine that counsel the poor to accept their lot meekly and account themselves more blessed than the rich and powerful. Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano of Guatemala City instructed his parishioners that "where there is poverty, there is happiness."

In 1957 Castillo Armas was assassinated by a member of his own guard in an incident never satisfactorily explained. The assassination led to several months of turmoil under two provisional presidents. Elections were first held in October and resulted in the announced victory of the candidate of the government party, the National Democratic Movement (Movimiento Democrático Nacional—MDN). Massive protest demonstrations organized by supporters of another candidate, Ydígoras, who claimed that the elections were fraudulent, led to major rioting and the resignation of the provisional president, Luis Arturo González López, his replacement by Guillermo Flores Avendaño, and the holding of new elections in January 1958. Although Ydígoras received the most votes in a three-candidate election, described by observers as generally fair, he did not receive a majority of all votes cast, so the decision went to Congress, which confirmed the election of Ydígoras (see Legislature, ch. 4). Most of the representatives of the MDN voted for Ydígoras, rather than the MDN's own candidate, reportedly after extensive bribery. This led to the secession of many hard-core supporters of the late Castillo Armas (*castillistas*), led by Mario Sandoval Alarcón, who founded a new party, the National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional—MLN).

### **Development and Authoritarianism**

Ydígoras' regime was noted for its corruption and repressive activities. The repression was intermittent rather than consistent, however, and Ydígoras fell in with the liberal developmentalism of the Alliance for Progress era, sponsoring, among other things, income tax and land reform legislation. The amount of land given out, mostly land donated by the United Fruit Company, was modest, benefiting a few hundred peasant families a year.

Although the economy was weakened during his first years in office by low coffee prices, it then began to grow as industry expanded in relation to the Central American Common Market area (see Foreign

Trade, ch. 3). Ydígoras sponsored an industrial promotion law that gave favorable treatment to new business, offering exemption from taxes and import duties and unrestricted remittance of profits. The contribution of manufacturing to gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary) rose steadily; the addition of 1,500 new jobs annually in the manufacturing sector did not increase its percentage of overall employment, however.

Although Ydígoras had declined the CIA's invitation to head the invasion that overthrew Arbenz, he permitted the agency to train Cuban exiles at the estate of Vice President Roberto Alejos in Retalhuleu. In return, Guatemala received a larger sugar quota and favorable treatment on loans, despite the protests of British representatives at the World Bank (see Glossary) because until 1966 Guatemala was technically in default on loans from Britain. Ydígoras was finally overthrown when it appeared that he intended to preside over fair elections, scheduled for December 1963, that would probably have been won by ex-president Arévalo. The coup was staged by the minister of national defense, Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, when Arévalo's return to the country in March 1963 resulted in enthusiastic popular demonstrations.

Colonel Peralta, a former military attaché in the United States, operated a government distinguished for its authoritarian approach. The frustration of the electoral process and the hopes for democratic change embodied in the candidacy of Arévalo induced some young people to join two insurgent movements led by junior army officers who had failed in a military uprising against the Ydígoras government in 1960—those led by Luis Augusto Turcios Lima and Marco Antonio Yon Sosa (see Military Traditions, ch. 5). The guerrillas turned to urban terrorism in October 1965, kidnapping wealthy Guatemalans for ransom to finance their activities. The Peralta government responded to the left-wing threat by counterterrorist activities, including the countenancing of death squads, some sponsored by members of the MLN, which had come to be known as "the party of organized violence." One of the most active groups was the Organized National Anticommunist Movement (Movimiento Anticomunista Nacional Organizado—MANO, but better known as Mano Blanca, or White Hand), which assassinated, usually after brutal torture, figures of the left, moderate left, and center left; peasants thought to sympathize with the guerrillas were also killed.

A new constitution was adopted in 1965, drafted by a constituent assembly handpicked by the Peralta government. On the whole, this was a more conservative document than the constitutions of 1945 and 1956, making no provision for labor courts and making more difficult the formation of legal political parties and the implementation of an agrarian reform. The new constitution extended the suffrage, however, to everyone, literate or illiterate, over the age of 18. The presidential term was shortened to four years, and reelection was forbidden. The regime also founded its own party, the Institutional Democratic Party

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

(Partido Institucional Democrático--PID), designed to be somewhat less extreme than the MLN.

The Peralta government had a mixed record in its economic policy. The economy expanded, and foreign investment came into the country, especially to develop nickel deposits in the department of Izabal (see Mining, ch. 3). Exports to other Central American states grew. Nevertheless, the industrial sector did not expand fast enough to absorb rural migrants to the cities, and unemployment and underemployment increased as urban areas grew. A regional development program was drawn up for the department of Izabal, which was where the forces of the Maoist guerrilla commander Yon Sosa operated. The income tax began to bring in appreciable amounts of revenue, although city dwellers complained because they were subject to tax on incomes above US\$2,000, whereas landowners were taxed only on incomes above US\$10,000.

The Peralta government dragged its feet in restoring constitutional normality, but elections were finally scheduled for March 1966. Three parties participated in the presidential elections: the government party, the PID; the MLN; and the Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario--PR). The PGT had been outlawed in 1964, and other parties were unable to attain the number of signatures required for registration as a legal party, raised under Peralta from 10,000 to 50,000. The new constitution has also raised the minimum age for presidential candidates to 40, a provision reputedly designed to exclude the most popular figure on the left, Francisco Villagrán Kramer, who had narrowly missed being elected mayor of Guatemala City in 1962 and who remained in exile, having been refused permission by the Peralta regime to reenter the country. Moreover, Mario Méndez Montenegro, the leader of the center-left party, the PR, was found shot in October 1965. His supporters, as well as other Guatemalans, refused to believe the official story that he had committed suicide.

The election, generally regarded as a fair one, was won by Julio César Méndez Montenegro, who had been picked by the PR to replace his brother as its candidate. Méndez Montenegro had a plurality in the popular vote but not an absolute majority, so his election had to be ratified by Congress, in which the PR held 30 of the 55 seats. Before Méndez Montenegro was allowed to take office, however, he was forced to sign a pact with the military that in effect made him their prisoner for four years. The pact gave the military control of their own internal affairs—including determining who would serve as minister of national defense—and a free hand in counterinsurgency operations (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). Méndez was able to secure agreement that he could first offer amnesty to the guerrillas and that a counterinsurgency campaign would only go into operation if the amnesty offer were refused. He was inaugurated on July 1, 1966, and the amnesty law was passed in August. It was rejected by the guerrilla leaders, however, and the counterinsurgency campaign went into operation in October.

The campaign was particularly successful in the department of Zacapa. Under the command of Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio, who benefited from advice from personnel of the United States Army Special Forces, or Green Berets, the military crushed the guerrilla forces in the area. Urban right-wing terrorism, operated by the military and the police in coordination with Mano Blanca and the New Anticommunist Organization (Nueva Organización Anticomunista—NOA), claimed many victims, especially among labor leaders, intellectuals, and students. Victims generally showed signs of having been tortured and mutilated; especially notorious cases included the rape and mutilation murder of a former Miss Guatemala and the assassination of a paralyzed law professor. Students and faculty at the University of San Carlos, especially those in the social sciences, were particularly victimized.

Left-wing terrorism, while of much smaller magnitude, also found prominent targets, including Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) Ambassador Karl von Spreti and United States Ambassador John Gordon Mein. The leader of the Rebel Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes—FAR), Turcios Lima, was killed in an automobile accident in 1967 and replaced by César Montes. Under Montes, the FAR broke with the PGT, alleging that it was trying to take over the FAR and guide it in too moderate a direction. Early in 1968 the rival guerrilla armies—the FAR and the November 13 Revolutionary Movement (MR-13)—merged into a single FAR. Yon Sosa, leader of the MR-13, was killed in 1970 in a clash with Mexican troops on the Mexico-Guatemala border.

The Catholic church, which initially had endorsed Castillo Armas' counterrevolution, subsequently attempted to stay clear of the country's political problems, but this proved impossible. At one point a right-wing group kidnapped the archbishop, and in 1967 several American Maryknoll priests were expelled from Guatemala for, among other things, attempting to organize agricultural workers.

In social and economic matters, the Méndez Montenegro government styled itself the "Third Government of the Revolution," implying that it stood in line of succession to the governments of Arévalo and Arbenz. Méndez received extensive support from the United States government, receiving over US\$100 million in loans, more than twice the total received by his two immediate predecessors. The loans were spent principally for infrastructure projects, such as hydroelectric dams and port improvements.

It was during this period that the traditionally dominant American corporations in Guatemala decided to reduce or close down their operations. United Fruit had begun to reorganize its operations in the late 1950s, organizing mergers and converting itself into the United Brands conglomerate. In the process of rationalizing operations, it decided to minimize the risks inherent in growing bananas and instead to concentrate its activity in marketing them. It thus sold or leased lands to small growers in Guatemala, buying, shipping, and marketing the stems, thus maintaining profits while reducing risk. It finally sold

its remaining banana lands to Del Monte in 1972. The railroad company declared bankruptcy in 1968 and was taken over by the Méndez Montenegro government. The electric company (EEG) was a subsidiary of American and Foreign Power, which was itself owned by the Electric Bond and Share Company. In 1969 Electric Bond and Share was bought by the Boise Cascade Corporation, which continued the policy of phasing out electric power operations in Latin America and diversifying into other activities. The Méndez government had bought some of EEG's generating installations in 1967 for the government-owned National Institute of Electrification (Instituto Nacional de Electrificación). The remainder of EEG's installations in Guatemala were bought by the government in 1972.

### **The 1970s**

The 1970 elections were held in an atmosphere of fear, which polarized the population and drove a frightened middle class to vote for the candidate of the army and the right. This was Colonel Arana Osorio, dubbed by his critics the "Jackal of Zacapa" because he had conducted the ruthless antisubversion campaign in that department that had cost the lives of thousands of peasant bystanders. Arana, who was nominated by the PID and MLN, received 43 percent of the vote, defeating the candidates of the PR and the Christian Democrats (Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca—DCG), originally a conservative party that had moved to the center left as the PR had moved from the left toward the center (see fig. 6). Because he had garnered less than the majority of the popular vote, it was necessary for Arana to be confirmed in office by vote of Congress.

Once in power, Arana acted forcefully. The *New York Times* estimated that there were 2,000 murders in the six months between November 1970 and May 1971. *Le Monde* quoted foreign diplomats as estimating that right-wing terrorists committed 15 assassinations for every one committed by left-wing guerrillas. Another estimate was of 15,000 deaths from political violence during Arana's first three years in office. In response to criticism of his support of right-wing terrorist squads, usually operated by the army and police, Arana replied that "if it is necessary to turn the country into a cemetery in order to pacify it, I will not hesitate to do so."

Arana also showed little sympathy for upper status critics of his regime; for example, in 1971 he deported the Episcopal bishop. In 1974 Arana rigged the presidential elections, forcibly prohibiting demonstrations of protest. The Christian Democrats, by then the leading opposition party representing mildly progressive elements among the urban middle and working classes, had thought they might be allowed to take power with a military candidate; they therefore chose as their nominee Brigadier General José Efraín Ríos Montt, who had served briefly as army chief of staff under Arana. The candidate of the MLN and the PID, who was "declared" elected, was Brigadier General Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García—former minister of national defense—with



*Metropolitan Cathedral, Guatemala City  
Courtesy Kathryn R. Stafford*

the MLN leader Sandoval as his vice president. Ríos Montt was persuaded not to contest the election results and to accept appointment as military attaché in Madrid.

Arana tried to become the power behind the throne through his own party, originally called the Organized Aranista Center (Central Aranista Organizada—CAO) but renamed the Authentic Nationalist Center (Central Auténtica Nacionalista—CAN). He was unsuccessful in this, not only because a serving president is necessarily the dominant figure in the country but also because Arana's prestige was heavily tarnished. The right-wing assassination squads sponsored by Arana had used their immunity from the law to branch out into other activities, such as drug trafficking, arms smuggling, and kidnapping for ransom; shoot-outs between rival gangs over division of the spoils caused some of this to become public knowledge.

Arana's CAN soon lost force and plausibility as a political party. The most important force on the right remained the MLN, headed by Vice President Sandoval. Attempting to free himself from control by the right and to devise policies more acceptable to the population at large, President Langerud moved cautiously to the center of the political spectrum, forming an understanding with the PR. The PR, now more or less in the center right, cooperated in Congress with the president's PID. Langerud showed a more tolerant attitude to labor unions, which



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

had been persecuted by Arana, and labor union membership rose from 27,500 in 1974 to about 80,000 in 1976. The president also tried to develop some support among the peasants, encouraging the formation of progovernment cooperatives among them. Colonization was encouraged in the Petén and in the region known as the Northern Transversal Strip (*Franja Transversal del Norte*), which was earmarked for development.

The process of political moderation was interrupted by a severe earthquake that struck Guatemala on February 4, 1976 (see *Geography*, ch. 2). The quake covered a vast area: 16 of Guatemala's 22 departments were affected. It was devastating in some areas: in the Highland department of Chimaltenango, almost 42,000 out of a total of some 43,000 homes were reportedly destroyed. Estimates put the number of dead at 30,000, injured at 77,000, and the homeless at over 1 million persons. The poor, who lived in ramshackle huts in the countryside and in hastily constructed urban dwellings (which in Guatemala City were often constructed in geologically unstable ravines), were hit the hardest. Established residential areas, which had been constructed to withstand earth tremors, were relatively unscathed, as were commercial and industrial centers in and out of the capital. The major exception to this rule was found at the nation's major port, Puerto Barrios, which was almost completely destroyed and cut off from the capital for several months by heavy damage incurred by the highway and railroad that connected them.

Earthquake reconstruction was facilitated by heroic efforts on the part of many Guatemalan and foreign rescue personnel and by large-scale foreign aid, including a US\$25 million emergency grant from the United States government. Guatemalan government efforts were coordinated by the Committee for National Reconstruction (*Comité de Reconstrucción Nacional—CRN*). Perhaps remembering the political favoritism and corruption that diverted foreign aid from real needs after the 1974 earthquake in Nicaragua, President Laugerud defeated a concerted attempt by Arana Osorio to be named to head the CRN and named instead Colonel Ricardo Peralta Méndez, the respected nephew of the former chief of state. That decision proved beneficial to the reconstruction process, which observers agreed was quite efficient and honest, but it also created bitter enemies for the president on his right, whose power would surge during the final two years of his presidency.

Despite concerted relief efforts, the inevitable social dislocations caused by the earthquake engendered acute social tensions. Resurgent labor unions failed to display the discipline that the government felt was demanded by the situation. In April Guatemala's two largest trade federations united to form the National Committee for Trade Union Unity (*Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical—CNUS*), which immediately stepped to the political forefront of voicing demands of the urban poor, such as adequate housing for those left homeless by the quake and fixing prices on basic commodities that had increased dra-

matically as a result of speculation and hoarding following the calamity. Numerous employers cut back on their work forces after the earthquake; it was noted that union leaders were most likely to lose their jobs. Strike activity picked up markedly, and so did the activities of death squads that had been dormant for the previous two years. In 1977 a new organization appeared. Called the Secret Anticomunist Army (Ejército Secreto Anticomunista—ESA), it specialized in the assassination and kidnapping of union leaders, students, politicians, and professionals who may have displayed the slightest interest in altering the status quo. During the subsequent five years, political violence became endemic (see *Civilian Political Actors*, ch. 4).

The year 1977 also proved to be fateful with respect to Guatemala's relations with the United States. The Department of State's first human rights report, which was highly critical of Guatemala, was rejected by the Langerud regime as unwarranted interference in its internal affairs. If this was the price of military aid, reasoned Guatemala's increasingly xenophobic leaders, then the United States could keep it. United States military aid remained closed to Guatemala until 1983, when a modest program of military training was resumed. A small program of development assistance for the poorest of the poor continued throughout the 1977-83 period.

An active guerrilla insurgency also reappeared during the Langerud presidency. In 1975, after several years of organization, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres—EGP) began insurgent activities in the department of Quiché. Though initially seen as a nuisance rather than a serious threat to internal security, the EGP was distinguished from its predecessor guerrilla organizations through its successful recruitment within the Indian population. By the end of Langerud's term in office, little encouragement was being shown to those who believed that the protection of the Indians' rights by peaceful means was possible. In May 1978, one month before the inauguration of his successor, a demonstration by Indians in the town of Panzós, Alta Verapaz, to protest that their legal land titles were not being recognized resulted in a massacre—the machine-gunning of more than 100 men, women, and children.

The March election had proved as fraudulent as the process that had brought Langerud to power four years previously. Though it was widely perceived that the 1978 presidential contest was won by the former chief of state, Peralta Azurdia, who ran as the candidate of the MLN, the winner was declared to be Brigadier General Fernando Romeo Lucas García, who ran under the banners of the PID and the PR but, more important, was the candidate favored by the Army High Command. Lucas García was overthrown three months before he was scheduled to step down, but the nearly four years that he ruled was riddled with incompetence, corruption, widespread murder conducted by government officials, rapid growth of the armed, guerrilla opposition, and the near disintegration of all bases of consensus among the

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

military and civilian elite on how to rule (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4; *Threats to Internal Security*, ch. 5).

The country's political crisis was fueled by the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua that brought the Sandinistas to power and by the subsequent insurgency in neighboring El Salvador. The Guatemalan insurgents, who in 1979 added a new group known as the Organization of People in Arms (Organización del Pueblo en Armas—ORPA) to their numbers, were buoyed by these events in its Central American neighbors. The government responded primarily by redoubling its violence against all perceived opposition. Lucas García's moderate vice president, Villagrán Kramer, tried to moderate government policies for two years but in 1980 resigned and, fearing for his own life, fled to the United States.

The once-buoyant economy suffered both from the near-political anarchy and from the recession of the early 1980s affecting the industrial countries that purchased the nation's agricultural exports. Tourism, a major source of foreign exchange, dried up in part as a result of the insurgency. The distribution of income remained heavily skewed in favor of the elite, as did the ownership of land (see *Growth and Structure of the Economy*, ch. 3). In the early 1980s economic conditions were poor and becoming worse.

The army also suffered the deprivations of the Lucas García regime. Junior and middle-ranking officers were increasingly, and publicly, blaming their failures against the growing insurgency on the corruption and lack of commitment of senior officers who occupied the National Palace. Several months of growing discontent among field commanders were followed by widespread charges that the presidential election of March 7, 1982, had been fraudulent. Public protests over the alleged fraud gave the junior officers the excuse to overthrow the regime, and on March 23 young officers ousted Lucas García and his elected successor and installed General José Efraín Ríos Montt, who had been denied electoral victory in 1974, in the National Palace.

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The pre-Hispanic ethnohistory was gathered in the early colonial period in a book called the *Popul Vuh*, now available in translation in various editions. Charles Gallenkamp's *Maya: The Riddle and Discovery of a Lost Civilization* is an interesting, if perhaps overly awed, account of the Maya civilization. Bernal Díaz del Castillo's *Conquest of New Spain* remains the most famous account of the conquest. An interesting source for the colonial period is Ramón Salazar's three-volume *Historia del Desarrollo Intelectual de Guatemala* (1857, available in a 1951 edition). Spain's early colonial policies are thoroughly examined in Lewis Hanke's *The Spanish Struggle for Justice in the Conquest of America*. A 1981 facsimile edition is available of the fascinating eyewitness account of an English resident during the early

### *Historical Setting*

years of independence. Henry Dunn's *Guatemala, or the Republic of Central America in 1827-8*. A good traveler's account in the next century is Erna Fergusson's *Guatemala*. The most reliable general history in English is Franklin Parker's *The Central American Republics* (1964) and, for the subsequent years, *Politics in Central America* by Thomas P. Anderson. Studies of the recent period tend to be more or less outspokenly (or favorable to Guatemalan governments and to the United States presence. A good example is Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer's *Bitter Fruit* (1982). A good source of information for many of the personalities, events, and relevant political data of the late 1950s and early 1960s period is *Guatemala: Election Factbook, March 6, 1966*, of the Institute for the Comparative Study of Political Systems. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 2. The Society and Its Environment



*Stone stela, showing man wearing mask and holding a baton and  
incense burners. Kaminaljuyu*

IN THE EARLY 1980s Guatemala, Central America's most populous country, was a society of extremes. The nation's heritage and history were characterized by deep-seated social and political inequity. A small percentage of the populace controlled great wealth while the majority lived in poverty.

Society had a distinctly agrarian cast: the majority of Guatemalans were rural; agriculture was the populace's principal source of livelihood. Land distribution formed the basis of rural society and underlay the indigence of the majority. Rural society was dominated by the dichotomy between large plantations holding prime agricultural land geared to commercial farming and small, fragmented holdings of marginal land devoted to subsistence agriculture. The mid-sized farm played only a minor (and diminishing) role in agricultural production. Plantations were the rule on the coast; small farms, in the Highlands.

The rural populace was diverse. It included a growing corps of landless and nearly landless laborers, small farmers who made ends meet by means of seasonal work on plantations, and resident plantation workers. Landlords were increasingly of the absentee variety. In recent decades the general trend has been the increasing impoverishment of most of those making their living from agriculture. In regions where plantations predominate the socioeconomic landscape, the continued expansion of large holdings has operated to the detriment of small- to mid-sized farmers. Permanent and temporary laborers have replaced peasant proprietors in those regions. In areas where small holdings are the rule, rapid population growth and the continued subdivision of holdings through inheritance have impoverished most people.

Until the mid- to late 1970s the single best way to better one's life was to migrate to a city. By virtually any measure—health, education, income, employment—the urban population's level of living was superior to that of rural folk. There was significant urban growth in the 1950s and 1960s; the pace slackened somewhat in the 1970s, but cities continued to expand. Ladinos were more frequent migrants than Indians, and women more frequent than men.

Ethnicity played a critical role in social relations. The principal ethnic division was between Hispanicized, Spanish-speaking ladinos and Mayan-speaking Indians; Indians were concentrated in the country's Highlands, while ladinos formed the majority in the lowlands and coastal regions. The dichotomy between the two groups touched virtually every facet of social life. If most Guatemalans were poor, almost all Indians were. Ladinos were the heirs of the conquistadores; in the modern era they dominated Indian communities through their knowledge of Spanish—the national language—and their ability to read and write. The urbanized middle class and elite are overwhelmingly ladino.

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

Kinship and family relations, as well as religious belief and affiliation, varied by ethnic group.

Ethnic membership is fluid in the sense that Indians may acquire traits typically considered ladino. Indians may learn Spanish, change their style of dress, leave their natal communities and become, thereby, ladino. Ethnic relations have been changing and dynamic. The relationship between Indians and ladinos varies from relatively cordial and tolerant to openly hostile and occasionally violent. In the 1960s and 1970s some Indians challenged ladino political and economic domination of Indian communities; few ladinos have been content to see their traditional hegemony threatened.

Although an estimated 80 percent of the population is Roman Catholic, Guatemala has one of Latin America's largest Protestant communities. The changing pattern of religious affiliation and practice is a major social movement. Indians traditionally adhered to a syncretic mix of Mayan and folk Catholic elements. Catholic and Protestant missionary activity in the Highlands introduced religious conflict into previously homogeneous Indian communities. The growth of fundamentalist sects has added further dissension. Evangelical fundamentalist groups differ from both Catholics and mainline Protestants in their vision of Christianity and the role of religion in the individual's and community's life. Sectarian divisiveness is not limited to the conventional splits between Roman Catholics and Protestants, the orthodox faithful and adherents of indigenous beliefs; fundamentalist congregations have a pronounced tendency to fragment, for splinter groups reflect social and personal factors as much as doctrinal differences.

In mid-1983 little verifiable information was publicly available on the number of displaced persons within Guatemala or the number of Guatemalans living in exile. Even less was known about the refugees, mostly from El Salvador, resident in Guatemala. The magnitude of the situation was indicated, however, by an estimate by the Guatemalan Conference of Catholic Bishops in May 1982 that about 1 million people, mostly Indians, had been displaced from their villages and were refugees in their own homeland. The government of Guatemala asserted that the bishops had grossly exaggerated the situation. As a result of the military measures instituted against Indian villages in mid- and late 1982, an unknown number of Indian villages were destroyed. The survivors either fled farther into the mountains or accepted relocation. A large number crossed the border into Mexico. In March 1983 estimates of the number of Guatemalans in camps in Mexico varied widely, but 30,000 to 40,000 were the figures most reliably reported.

The socioeconomic data used in this chapter—as elsewhere in the book—are derived from the United Nations, the United States Agency for International Development, departments and agencies of the Guatemalan and United States governments, various journals and other publications, and groups and individuals who possess longtime interest



in and knowledge of the Guatemalan society. The data should be viewed as presenting well-informed estimates of orders of magnitude rather than precise measurements. Moreover, in the spring of 1983 the society was continuing to experience profound social upheaval, numerous traditional social patterns had already been drastically altered, and continued change must be expected.

### **Geography**

The nation's boundaries encompass approximately 108,780 square kilometers, an area slightly larger than the state of Tennessee. Although the country lies entirely within the tropics, its varied terrain provides great contrasts in climate. The climate ranges from hot and humid in most of the lowlands to cold, frost, and occasional snow in the Highlands. The climatic variation makes possible the cultivation of any crop grown in the Western Hemisphere.

The climate and associated vegetation depend largely on altitude, which ranges from sea level to almost 4,200 meters, and proximity to one of the coasts. The *tierra caliente* (hot country) extends from sea level to about 750 meters; it has average daytime temperatures of 29°C to 32°C, the *tierra templada* (temperate country) extends from 750 meters above sea level to about 1,660 meters; daytime temperatures average from 24°C to 26.6°C, and nighttime temperatures average from 15.5°C to 21°C. The *tierra fría* (cold country) extends above the 1,660-meter level and has daytime averages as high as 26°C and nighttime averages of 10°C and occasionally lower.

The prevailing winds are the rain-bearing northeast trades that blow inland from the Caribbean. As a consequence the northern lowlands of Petén, parts of the Highlands in the departments (major administrative divisions) of Alta Verapaz, Baja Verapaz, and Izabal, and the Caribbean coastal region have humid conditions for most of the year (see fig. 1). The rest of the country has a distinct dry season from November through April except for a strip of the upper piedmont on the Pacific slope between 1,000 and 1,600 meters above sea level, where the rainfall conditions are similar to those along the Caribbean coast. The dry season is called *verano* (summer) and the wet season *invierno* (winter).

### **Pacific Coast**

The Pacific coast of Guatemala has no natural harbors, and its offshore waters are quite shallow. Long stretches of black sand line the shore. Lagoons filled with mangrove lie inland from the beach for long distances. The Canal de Chiquimulilla, which runs along the coast for about 100 kilometers, is part of a coastal lagoon that has been dredged to allow small craft traffic (see fig. 3).

The coastal plain is predominantly savanna interspersed with forests, which line the rivers flowing from the Highlands (see Forestry, ch. 3). Farther inland tropical forest covers the foothills and lower slopes of the Highlands. Diversified agriculture is practiced between 100 and 600 meters above sea level. The soils are well drained and fertile, being

composed of volcanic ash and alluvium. Temperatures are typical of the *tierra caliente*. The slopes in this area are sufficiently gentle for the intensive use of modern agricultural machinery.

Monsoonal winds blowing from the Pacific bring rain to the area but are often destructive to crops, and the pronounced dry season necessitates irrigation. Farther inland the plain becomes a steeper, more dissected ascent to the Highlands through the upper piedmont, 600 to 1,600 meters above sea level. Tropical broadleaf forests once covered these upper slopes. Rainfall is heavy, especially in the western section where it averages over 250 centimeters annually. The dry season is short, and temperatures are somewhat lower than in the coastal plain and lower piedmont regions. Most of the nation's high-quality coffee is grown in this area, where the volcanic soil, heavy rainfall, and abundance of shade trees, under which the coffee plants are grown, provide nearly ideal conditions.

### **Highlands**

About half the country is mountainous. The dominant mountain range is the Sierra Madre, which runs roughly parallel to the Pacific coast from the border with Mexico to that with El Salvador. There are 14 major volcanoes in this range, the two highest being Volcán Tajumulco (4,196 meters) and Volcán Tacaná (4,069 meters).

Guatemala is situated in an exceptionally seismic zone in which five major tectonic plates meet: American, Caribbean, Cocos, Nazca, and Pacific. Earthquakes, therefore, are frequent and at times violent. Earthquakes in 1717 and 1773 destroyed the old capital city, Antigua Guatemala. Much of Quezaltenango, the second largest city, was destroyed in 1902, and Guatemala City was severely damaged in 1915.

An earthquake in February 1976 was perhaps the most destructive to date. Approximately 9,000 square kilometers—over 5 percent of the national territory—were affected. An estimated 30,000 people were killed, and scores of thousands more were injured. About 20 percent of the population lost their dwellings, and many of them suffered greatly in the below-freezing weather. The major port, Puerto Barrios, was severely damaged, and the highway from the port to the capital was closed for over six weeks, creating additional hardship. The government estimated the material damage at US\$750 million, equal to about 20 percent of the gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary) in 1975.

A number of rivers flow from the Sierra Madre to the Pacific Ocean. They are navigable for only short distances, but they have considerable potential for hydroelectric power (see Energy, ch. 3). There are two important lakes in the range. Lago de Atitlán is counted as one of the most beautiful in the world. The volcanoes Atitlán, San Pedro, and Tolimán line its shores, as do numerous villages. The lake, which is over 300 meters deep in places, is fed by a number of rivers, but its drainage is underground. Lago Amatitlán, just south of Guatemala City, is smaller and less spectacular. Steam rises from this warm-water lake, and medicinal sulfur springs are found near its banks. The nearby

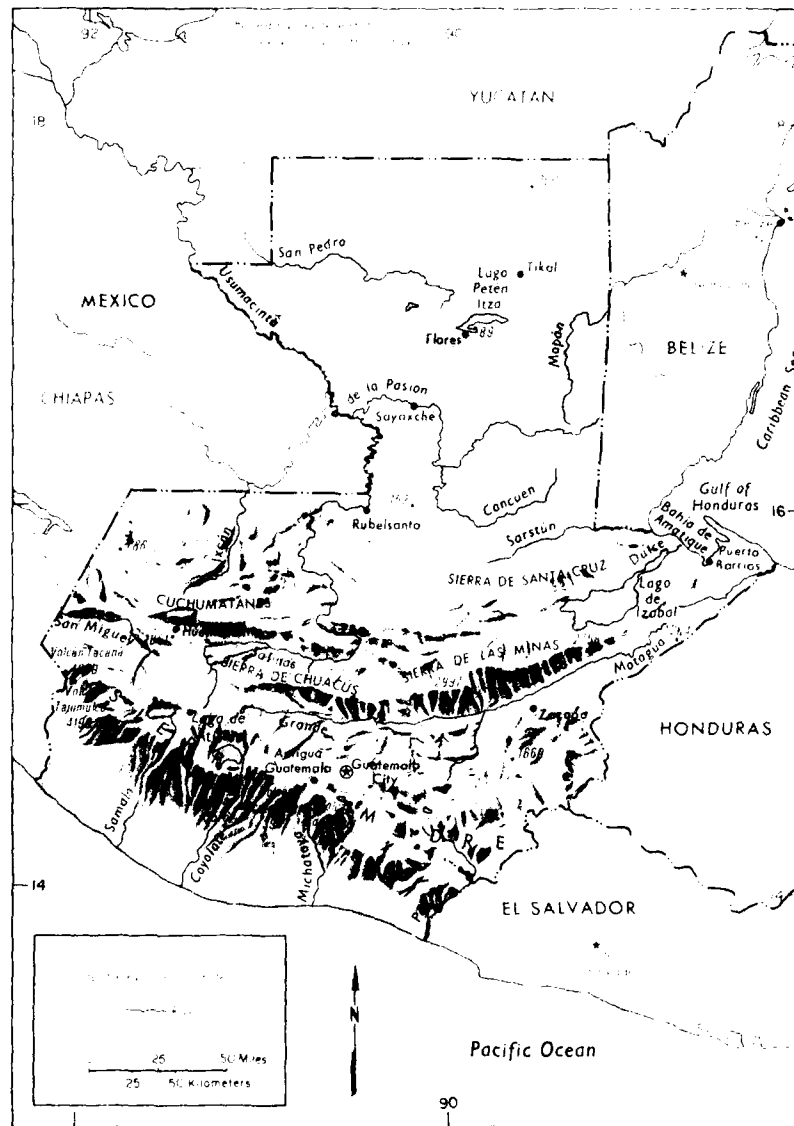


Figure 3. Topography and Drainage

Voleán de Pacaya, which erupted in 1964, produces these effects. The lake has its outlet in the Río Michatoya.

#### Caribbean Coast and River Valleys

The coast along the Gulf of Honduras is flat and open to Caribbean storms. The Bahía de Amatique, which is 15 kilometers wide and 40 kilometers long, is sheltered, however, and Puerto Barrios is located

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

on its shore, as are the smaller ports of Livingston and Santo Tomás de Castilla (Matías de Gálvez).

The climate of the coastal area, including the valleys that extend inland, is humid and tropical; there is no distinct dry season. At Puerto Barrios the monthly temperature averages range from about 23°C in December to over 28°C in May. Tropical rain forest of broadleaf evergreen trees covers much of the area except where modern plantations have been established. Such plantations are found primarily in the Río Motagua Valley, one of the three valley corridors that extend inland from the coast. The valleys serve to link the coast to various parts of the interior, particularly the Highlands, but the valley corridors are separated from one another by mountain ranges.

#### **Petén**

The vast area of Petén, comprising about one-third of the national territory, extends into the Yucatán Peninsula. It is a rolling limestone plateau, between 150 and 225 meters above sea level, covered with tropical rain forest interspersed with wide savannas.

Because of the porosity of the soil, which is of relatively poor quality, much of the drainage is underground. There are, however, numerous small lakes that overflow and flood the land when the rains are particularly heavy. Most of the rivers flow either through Mexico to the Gulf of Mexico or through Belize to the Gulf of Honduras.

The Río Salinas rises in Huehuetenango and flows north to contribute to the Río Usumacinta, which empties into the Gulf of Mexico. The two rivers form part of the border between Mexico and Guatemala. Flores, the capital of Petén, is situated on an island in Lago Petén Itzá, which is about 24 kilometers long, three kilometers wide, and about 50 meters deep. The lake has no visible outlet because its drainage is underground.

#### **Population**

Guatemala's ninth population census taken in March 1981 enumerated a total population of 6,043,559. As of early 1983 only preliminary figures were available; demographers and statisticians continued to debate the precise measure of underenumeration in the census. A preliminary count of the population by age was unavailable—making any evaluation of the census's coverage more difficult.

Estimates of undercounting for the 1973 census ranged from 9.5 to 12.2 percent of the estimated population. Early estimates by Guatemala's General Directorate of Statistics (Dirección General de Estadística) calculated an underenumeration of roughly 10 percent in the 1981 census. Other experts, noting the dramatic changes in fecundity, mortality, and international migration necessary to achieve this, estimated the 1981 count to be low by some 17 to 18 percent. The magnitudes in the differences are substantial. Assuming the enumerated figures for 1973 (a total population of 5.16 million) and 1981 (6.01 million) to be correct, the country's population growth had been on the order of 2 percent annually—down nearly a percentage point from



*Survivors of the 1976 earthquake  
Courtesy John Metelsky, Agency for International Development*

the 1964-73 intercensal period. Conversely, if there were an undercount of roughly 10 percent in 1973 and of 17 percent in 1981, the population would have grown some 2.7 to 2.8 percent annually in the 1970s. The differences underscore the difficulties in evaluating statistical information for the country. Data for the department of Guatemala are generally acknowledged to be reasonably accurate and complete; information on rural Guatemala is problematic.

Assuming an undercount in the range of 17 percent and an annual growth rate of 2.5 percent, the March 1983 population projection would be roughly 7.6 million. The Population Reference Bureau of Washington, D.C., however, calculated a mid-1982 population of 7.7 million and estimated that the annual rate of growth was 3.2 percent. That data would project to a mid-1983 population of 7,946,000. The United States Central Intelligence Agency concluded that the mid-1982 population was 7,557,000 and that the annual rate of growth was 3.1 percent, which would result in a mid-1983 population of about 7,771,000. Nevertheless, the estimate of 7.6 million seemed more reliable.

The adjusted 1973 census indicated that males constituted 50.7 percent of the population. The census also reported that over 44 percent of the population was under 15 years of age and over 55 percent under 20 years of age. One may presume that by 1983 the ratios had changed

slightly to show an even younger population, but the data were not available to reach a firm conclusion.

### **Social Organization**

In early 1983 Guatemala's president José Efraín Ríos Montt said, "In this country there are just two sectors—the exploited and the exploiters." It was perhaps a simplification of social realities, but only slightly. Guatemala's elite is minute, perhaps 1 percent of society. Some 50 families, forming a reticulate network of alliances and marriages, control a significant portion of all commercial, agricultural, and financial resources. They account for an estimated 50 percent of private finance, 20 percent of coffee production, and roughly 100 of the largest industries. The middle class accounts for less than 20 percent of the population. These are educated Guatemalans who enjoy a modicum of economic security. At its upper reaches the middle class includes prosperous businessmen and professionals whose families' finances and investments are as varied if not as extensive as those of the elite. Military cadets, the future armed forces officers, are not the scions of the richest families but come from the ranks of the upwardly mobile middle class.

Income distribution underscores the extent to which the society is one of extremes. In the 1970s the top quartile received approximately two-thirds of total income; the bottom quartile, 6 to 7 percent. Estimates put as much as three-fourths of the population below the poverty line as calculated by conventional international standards. The greatest disparity in income was between the top quarter and the rest of the population. The top 25 percent outearned the lowest 25 percent by nearly 10 times, while the second quartile did so by only some two and one-half times.

The situation of the poorest has worsened in recent decades. In 1950 the top 5 percent garnered less than one-half of national income; by the late 1970s they increased their share to nearly 60 percent. Those in the bottom 50 percent dropped from 9 to 7 percent of national income. The dilemma of the poor grew increasingly acute in the early 1980s. Inflation rose; per capita income (in 1981 and 1982) declined; unemployment and underemployment were estimated at 35 to 40 percent.

The lowest income groups are in the western Highlands, where roughly 70 percent of all Indians live; they earn less than low-income groups in the highly urbanized, Hispanic central region. This general relationship holds for all quartiles—even when controlled for differences in rural and urban residence. An urban middle-income earner in the Highlands receives less than a counterpart in the central region. The city-dwelling ladino elite is worlds removed from the Indian farmer of the Highlands, whose annual earnings in the early 1980s averaged 10 to 20 percent of national per capita income.

Although the majority of the populace is poor, poverty itself and the social life of the poor vary regionally and ethnically. In the early 1980s

more than one-half of the economically active population were employed in agriculture. Most of these people were landless, or nearly landless, farmers and seasonal agricultural laborers. Others were "semi-agriculturists" supplementing their holdings' meager produce with small-scale crafts production and trading. Both of these were mainstays of the nonagricultural labor force, nearly one-third of which was self-employed. Some found a remunerative livelihood in the tourist trade or manufacturing crafts for the international market; for most, however, self-employment was merely a euphemism for underemployment. Those engaged in crafts faced increasing competition from cheap manufactured goods; traders were disadvantaged relative to large retailers and wholesalers, who were able to get better prices by buying in quantity.

Most wage earners found work in small-scale enterprises. Modern industries employed roughly 5 percent of the labor force. For these wage earners working conditions were difficult, wages minimal, and benefits limited; these workers remained, nonetheless, among the more favored segments of the working population. Larger industries were the scene of intense unionization drives in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Management's efforts to repress unions, to say nothing of the large pool of reserve labor, hampered unionization.

Men and women of the lower class can expect to have a varied work history. Men, in particular rural-urban migrants, might begin work on a subsistence plot in the Highlands, supplemented with seasonal migration to coastal plantations. An individual might follow this with a stint in the military; while doing military service he might learn a trade. Thereafter, a man would have the option of continued military service with a sideline or of opening a business of his own. Unskilled workers move from agriculture, to construction, to a variety of low-level, service-sector occupations. Most could expect to be self-employed at some time during their working lives. There is a similar variety in the jobs women undertake. Women may produce handicrafts, as many Indian women do. They may supplement agricultural wage labor with a plethora of occupations: grinding corn meal, making and selling tortillas, furnishing meals to workers, or sewing, to name but a few. Throughout the twentieth century domestic service has absorbed the bulk of women in the nonagricultural labor force. In the 1960s and 1970s the absolute numbers of women who were servants rose, while women's share of the industrial labor force declined.

#### **Regional and Ethnic Diversity**

Ladinos (see Glossary), Mayan-speaking Indians, and Black Caribs are Guatemala's main ethnic groups. A small number of Black Caribs are centered in Livingston and its environs on the Caribbean coast. They are descendants of fugitive slaves and the Carib Indians of the Antilles. The British exiled the Black Caribs from the Caribbean to a small island in the Gulf of Honduras as punishment for supporting the French in conflicts accompanying the French Revolution. Most of the exiles migrated to the mainland, and Black Carib settlements now stretch along Central America's Caribbean coast from Belize to Nica-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

ragua (see fig. 2). Like its Mayan Indians, Guatemala's Black Caribs are frequently bilingual, in this case, in Carib and Spanish.

Ladinos and Mayans form the vast majority of the country's population. Mayan Indians are concentrated in a wide swath in the Highlands—a diagonal band stretching from the northwest to the south. Ladinos are in the majority in coastal areas and the eastern lowlands. They also outnumber Indians in the sparsely settled Petén, although substantial numbers of Indians migrated to that region in search of land in the 1970s and early 1980s. Regional ethnic composition corresponds to the country's main agricultural division, that between the *fincas* (large-scale commercial plantations) of the coastal lowlands and middle altitudes and the *minifundios* (small, fragmented subsistence plots) of the Highlands.

Ladinos comprise nearly 80 percent of the urban population. In the 1970s nearly half of all ladinos were urban in residence compared with less than one-fifth of all Indians. Even in the Highlands, where ladinos are a distinct minority, they are disproportionately urban.

Ladino society lacks the tight integration typical of many Highland Indian communities. There is, for ladinos, no cohesive local institution comparable to the Indians' civil-religious hierarchy. Wealth and family ties, rather than community service, give the individual prestige. Ladinos have multiple ties connecting them with ladinos in other rural localities and the national capital. Local elites normally have relatives in Guatemala City who serve as invaluable links to the center of power and decisionmaking. Local elites serve, in many respects, as the representatives of national society in the Highland community. They hold positions of prominence and influence in local and national affairs alike.

Ladino values contrast with those of Indians. Ladino males tend to be secular and anticlerical—if not overtly antireligious. There is a tendency to regard religion and religious sentiment as the domain of women. Ladinos disparage manual work although, paradoxically, they admire the Indians' willingness to work very hard at menial tasks. Conspicuous consumption, often in the form of lavish housing, validates wealth and status for a ladino. Prosperous Indians who make such choices are subject to criticism.

Economic stratification and social differentiation are more marked among ladinos than among Indians. Ladinos span the social hierarchy from the national elite to landless plantation workers. Even within the Highlands they run the gamut from large-scale merchants and landholders to peasant farmers scarcely less well off than poor Indians. The actual degree of economic stratification and the social significance attached to differences in wealth vary from community to community. Even allowing for disparities in wealth, ladinos overall are the social superiors of Indians. Indians will work for well-to-do Indians or ladinos. Rarely will a ladino work for an Indian.

Guatemala's Indians are Mayans belonging to an estimated 18 to 28 linguistically distinct groups. The principal dialects are Quiché, Cakchiquel, Kekchi, and Mam. Between 1921 and 1973 the proportion of



Indians in the total population declined from nearly two-thirds to slightly less than one-half. In the early 1980s, given the dearth of current and dependable data on rural Guatemala, experts hedged their bets, simply estimating the populace at half Indian and half ladino.

As in Peru and the upper Amazon, colonial Guatemala was a region in which the spread of Hispanic influence was limited. Colonial rule itself was an extension of the "divide and conquer" strategy that had proved militarily effective in defeating Central America's Indians. It allowed a measure of local autonomy at the same time that it isolated Indian communities. Occasional unrest and infrequent revolts were geographically limited. Ethnicity and pronounced localism separated Indian communities from each other as well as their Spanish overlords. Family and village were the twin poles of the individual's loyalty. Although many communities were nearly self-sufficient in foodstuff production, crafts were village specialties and played an important role in village identity. Craftsmen and traders linked communities in regional marketing systems; they were virtually the only effective supra-locality integration.

Beginning late in the nineteenth century, plantation agriculture undermined the isolation and autonomy of Indian villages. Expanding coffee *fincas* required a steady supply of Indian labor. Labor *corvées*, debt peonage, and vagrancy laws were all used to ensure the supply of seasonal labor for the coffee harvests. President Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-85) encouraged ladinos to settle in Highland Indian villages. They entered communities as labor recruiters for coastal plantations, acquired Indian lands by hook or by crook, and soon constituted themselves as a local elite, cornering the Highlands' expanding commercial sector and monopolizing political offices.

The twentieth-century Indian community—closed, endogamous, hostile to outsiders—was a creation of these forces. Its organization reflected the Indians' patent disadvantages in dealing with the larger society. It offered protection, albeit limited, from national political and economic forces. Social organization was aimed at curtailing economic stratification and, hence, divisiveness within the village. In addition, the community blocked, insofar as possible, the diffusion of values and the entry of material goods from the ladino-dominated national society. Indian political and religious institutions remained nominally autonomous although, in fact, they were subordinate to local ladinos in important ways. Their concerns focused on local affairs and domestic events.

Ladinos have held sway in all significant economic activities. Commercial agriculture, mining, and manufacturing have been—with rare exceptions—the ladinos' domain. Even where Indians have controlled some measure of local resources, their financial clout has not been proportionate to their numbers. Occasionally, a few well-to-do Indians may acquire substantial landholdings or retail stores, but the largest commercial establishments and landholdings remain in ladino hands.

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

Ladinos have dominated through their knowledge of Spanish, the national language, and their literacy. Literacy rates among ladinos averaged more than three times those of Indians in the 1960s and 1970s. In the late 1970s roughly 80 percent of the Indian population remained illiterate. Further, even poor ladinos have a national reference group, but Indians are divided culturally and linguistically from other Indian groups as well as being isolated from the national society. Indeed, Indians' negative stereotypes of other Indians can rival those they hold of ladinos. Local ladino elites maintain social links with the national middle and upper middle class centered in Guatemala City.

Ladino dominance reinforces and is reinforced by the generally low esteem in which ladinos hold Indians. One observer recorded fully 30 derogatory terms referring to Indians. Ladinos equate anything Indian with "lack of sophistication, lack of education, and poverty," notes one anthropologist. For most of the past 100 years official policy, as well as social thought, has viewed Indian "backwardness" as a force of social fragmentation within the nation and the Indians' failure to adopt the norms of ladino society as the explanation for their continued poverty. Ladinos view Indians' distinctive religious practices as further proof (were it necessary for them) that Indians are wasteful, drunken, idolatrous, and ignorant.

Such attitudes justify the disdain with which ladinos treat Indians. Ladinos address Indians with familiarity, as one addresses children; by contrast, they expect Indians to use titles of respect when speaking to them. Ladinos demand to be served before Indians in stores, and shopkeepers will interrupt a transaction with an Indian to wait on a ladino customer. Indians are to step off the sidewalk to permit ladinos to pass. Individual ladinos may behave paternalistically toward Indians they know; ladino bureaucrats in Highland towns, however, feel little compunction about treating Indians with open discourtesy, ridiculing in particular their lack of proficiency in Spanish.

Indian views of ethnicity, understandably, diverge. If ladinos hold negative stereotypes of Indians, Indians are ready to reciprocate. Ladinos, they say, are like dogs—not to be trusted around food. They are likened to vultures: indiscriminately ravenous in their eating habits. Indians normally fear and avoid contact with ladinos. Failure to obey a command (frequently poorly understood in a language in which most Indians are not conversant) might lead to a beating or worse. A common Indian prayer entreats the spirits that the supplicant might be spared meeting a ladino that day. Indeed, Indians who have some schooling and are reasonably fluent in Spanish indicate the change wrought in themselves by saying they are unafraid to meet (or deal with) anyone.

By the 1960s and 1970s astronomical population growth had made superfluous previous forced-labor legislation that had been designed to ensure a seasonal agricultural labor force. The press on the Highland land base made work on coastal plantations absolutely essential to most families' yearly survival. Community studies offered a revealing glimpse at the constraints Indians faced. The holdings of the current generation

of farmers averaged roughly half those of their fathers. The decrease in the length of fallowing resulted in a dramatic drop in yields—to as little as one-quarter of their earlier levels (see *Cropping Patterns and Production*, ch. 3). The shrinking land-population ratio put a premium on the supply of animal fertilizer. The marginality of farming in these circumstances can be judged from the fact that market officials in many communities have as their sole remuneration the right to collect manure from the village plaza after market days. These individuals make repeated trips to fields, often hours away from the plaza, carrying heavy bags of raw manure. Seasonal agricultural labor permits families to eke out a living, but their margin of safety is slim. Some families receive virtually their entire annual wage in advances before leaving for the coastal *fincas*. Young men whose inheritance is already hopelessly fragmented spend most of the year in wage labor, returning to their natal communities only for major fiestas. Anthropologist Waldemar Smith characterizes the trajectory of the typical Indian family's fortunes in recent decades as one of "peasant-to-proletarian economic devolution."

A minority of Indians have been able to work out alternatives to "sub-subsistence" farming combined with seasonal wage labor. In some communities families have begun cash cropping—garlic, onions, vegetables, and coffee are the most common choices. For some it has been an alternative that provides a secure and remunerative livelihood. Some Indians have even been able to buy lands back from local ladinos.

Indigenous crafts and, until the early 1980s, the growing tourist industry offered economic opportunities for still others. Shopkeeping, tailoring, baking, and the like supplemented the meager production of family agricultural holdings. Such alternatives give real advantages to Indians who would otherwise face annual migration to coastal *fincas*. Migration forces families to leave their crops untended for most of the season and either to sell their livestock or leave the animals with a neighbor. In some instances small-scale craftsmen, muleteers, and peddlers have parlayed their operations into highly profitable commercial operations. In at least one community these Indian entrepreneurs broke the ladino monopoly on commerce and won a competitive slot in the national economy. They took over wholesale and retail establishments, founded transport firms, became themselves labor contractors for plantations, and expanded traditional crafts, such as weaving, into minor industries.

For still other Indians, schooling and a knowledge of Spanish have provided an avenue of upward mobility. Those so favored have remained a distinct minority, but for the Indian fortunate enough to obtain a secondary or university education it has meant an entry to a professional career. For still others (usually of an older generation) a tour in the military has offered the chance to learn Spanish and acquire some familiarity with the workings of the larger society.

Relations between Indians and ladinos have always been highly variable, running the spectrum from open hostility and occasionally violent confrontation to relative peace and cooperation. The intensity of inter-

ethnic conflict has altered in response to the changing fortunes Indians have enjoyed. Where Indians have remained uneducated agricultural laborers subservient to ladino shopkeepers, labor contractors, and landlords, all has been well. Where they have challenged the traditional areas of ladino hegemony and become professionals and entrepreneurs, interethnic rivalries have intensified.

Ethnic affiliation remains more difficult to determine in the changing milieu of Highland society. Dress and language were formerly the most certain indicators of Indian status. The experience of wage labor, however, has led most Indian men to adopt Hispanic dress. They tend to wear manufactured clothing of a variety largely indistinguishable from their ladino counterparts. Women have maintained the traditional garb: a long skirt with a sash and a distinctive blouse (*huipil*). Further refinements in style and color make it possible to identify a woman by her village and linguistic group. In the early 1980s even this was changing in regions where young Indian women were migrating to urban areas in search of employment.

Mother tongue continues to be a surer indicator of ethnic affiliation. There are villages where Indian parents are bilingual in Spanish and a Mayan language, while their offspring are monolingual in Spanish, but such villages are rare. Speaking an indigenous language in the home and knowledge of Indian culture are the most definitive ethnic markers. While many Highland ladinos speak a little of the local Indian dialect, few approach fluency. In addition, ladinos are ignorant of the intricacies of Indian religious tenets and practices (see *Indigenous Belief Systems*, this ch.). Overall, Indians are more commonly bilingual and bicultural, while ladinos are monolingual and monocultural. Bilingualism itself is spread unevenly through the Indian population. Men know Spanish more frequently than women, younger generations more than older.

There are, however, communities where a younger generation is monolingual in Spanish and Hispanic in dress and occupation yet is still considered and considers itself ethnically Indian—a fact that underscores the persistence of ethnic classification. Anthropologist Norman Schwartz describes a Petén community whose population was virtually homogeneous culturally but whose inhabitants continued to divide themselves into Indian and ladino groups on the basis of ethnic boundaries drawn in generations past. Indians become ladino or “pass” as such only by leaving their natal villages, learning Spanish, and adopting Hispanic dress and customs. It is, one suspects, a gradual process, linked to wage labor on coastal *fincas*. There the discrimination in wages and working conditions to which Indians are subject gives the individual a substantial incentive to be considered ladino. The individual migrant’s assimilation into ladino society is facilitated by the localistic nature of those institutions reinforcing Indian identity. Lengthy or permanent migration removes the individuals from the only civil-religious hierarchy and fiesta system of which they are truly a part.

### *The Society and Its Environment*

Within the local community, traits that ladinos see as Hispanic, Indians view as perfectly compatible with being Indian. An Indian may learn Spanish and assume a "ladino" occupation and urban residence without anyone's attributing a change in ethnic affiliation. Ladinos judge such individuals to be improving themselves. Although Indians applaud a person's bettering his or her economic situation, they view any undue aping of ladino behavior as affected. Economically successful Indians do not see themselves as becoming ladino, and they continue to reject much of Hispanic culture. They have small incentive to "pass" when the economic benefits of ladino status are available within their own communities. They take great pride in their own cultural traditions and way of life. Individuals migrate and "pass"; communities, or segments within them, forge a new ethnic identity. The economically successful see themselves as validly Indian, but *civilizados*—civilized and modern without becoming ladino.

#### **Rural-Urban Variation**

Rural Guatemala, where two-thirds of the population lived in the early 1980s, was marked by profound inequality. In the 1970s more than 40 percent of the rural labor force was landless, and an additional 50 percent were nearly landless. The top 1.8 percent of the economically active population in agriculture garnered roughly 40 percent of farm earnings, while the bottom four-fifths (83.3 percent) received roughly one-third of agricultural income. Further, according to estimates of the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development, the situation of the rural poor deteriorated in the late 1960s and 1970s. By the early 1980s some 60 percent of the rural populace earned less than the equivalent of US\$80 annually; 90 percent either did not have any land at all or had too little to meet their basic needs.

As World Bank and United States Agency for International Development (AID) specialists have observed, a highly skewed pattern of land distribution underlies the poverty of the rural populace. According to preliminary results of the 1979 agricultural census, nearly 80 percent of all farms had 3.5 hectares or less; they accounted for about 10 percent of agricultural land. At the other end of the scale, holdings of 450 hectares or more—2.5 percent of all farms—controlled nearly two-thirds of farmland.

Concentration in landownership combines with a pattern of land use that does little to alleviate rural poverty. Large areas of good land held by coastal *fincas* are underutilized at the same time that Highland holdings inappropriate for intensive use are under cultivation. As a general rule the smaller the holding the more marginal the land, and the smaller the overall size of the holding the more fragmented the various plots. The best lands, held by the largest owners, are devoted to export crops. Foodstuff production is largely relegated to the marginal *minifundios* of the Highlands. Indeed, between 1970 and 1977 the amount of agricultural land planted in the main food crops declined 15 percent. Small farmers, or *minifundistas*, use their land more intensively and efficiently than do large landowners. Despite their su-

perior land and greater resources, the largest owners use on average one-third to one-half of their holdings. Latifundios produce only one-quarter of the yields per hectare of *minifundios*.

Government efforts at land reform legislation have had limited impact. Throughout the 1960s and 1970s as an alternative to land redistribution officials encouraged settlement of Petén and, more recently, the Northern Transversal Strip (Franja Transversal del Norte), a 40-kilometer-wide strip running from the Caribbean coast to Río Ixcán. Colonization projects have been confronted with difficulties. Much of the land slated for distribution is unsuitable for intensive cultivation and unlikely to be available in quantities large enough to alleviate the pressure on the Highland land base. The actual distribution of land and titles has been unsystematic. The well-to-do have shared in grants to the detriment of the poor. Conflicting land claims go back years and have led to violent confrontations. The most infamous of these took place at Panzós, in Alta Verapaz, in 1978 and resulted in the deaths of more than 100 peasants. Increases in land values in those colonization regions where mineral exploration and road construction have begun have led to small landholders' being supplanted by more powerful claimants (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). Peasant farmers have ended their migration and colonization efforts simply as peons on latifundios.

The configuration of rural society varies regionally. Where the typical agricultural enterprise is the family-owned and family-run *minifundio*, the social spectrum ranges from a small local elite to land-poor peasants. The local elite includes business leaders—typically, larger store owners and those in transport and wholesaling—local government officials, and a few professionals. In the middle ranges there may be an occasional small farmer who has broken into cash cropping or has managed to acquire enough land to be nearly self-sufficient in foodstuff production. Most peasants are not so fortunate—they are small farmers relying on a variety of makeshift strategies to get through the year. Small holders supplement their agricultural earnings with seasonal wage labor, crafts, or peddling.

The social scene in regions where large-scale commercial operations dominate is diverse. It includes temporary wage laborers, a small labor force resident on plantations, and a few small and middling landowners beleaguered by and losing ground to larger commercial farms. *Fincas* themselves are a mixed lot. The largest spreads are frequently corporately owned and run according to the best canons of modern economic and agronomic practices. They tend to abide by existing labor legislation, and their resident laborers fare comparatively well.

Traditional *fincas*, by contrast, are typically owned by local individuals or families. Ideally, the landowner serves as a patron to the laborers. He should know all the workers by name and might be a godparent to some of their children. The traditional *finsa* labor force is stable. At its core is a group of related families whose residence on the *finsa* spans generations. A network of kin ties offers substantial



*Young woman in the village of Santiago de Atitlán*

mutual aid and support. The *finca* frequently has its own patron saint and fiesta; for its inhabitants it serves as a reasonably supportive and fulfilling social milieu.

In the 1960s and 1970s the traditional *finca* was supplanted by growing numbers of mid-sized plantations bought by successful urban businessmen and run speculatively by these absentee owners. For such

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

individuals a given plantation was simply another of the family's many and varied assets. The resident labor force on these plantations was typically more mobile than that of traditional *fincas*; in one study the length of residence of laborers on speculative plantations averaged one-third that of their counterparts on traditional *fincas*. Its labor force frequently lacked both the advantages of the largest, most profitable commercial enterprises and those of the traditional, personalistically run *fincas*. It was speculative plantation owners, one suspects, that Ríos Montt had in mind in 1982 when he castigated those who "neither respect nor comply with the minimum wage." The trend in recent years has clearly been toward an increase in the number of absentee-owned plantations. Even where traditional patron-owners remain, the customary prerogatives that workers have enjoyed have been eroded by the presence of their less privileged counterparts on speculative *fincas*, to say nothing of the growing number of temporary wage laborers.

Not surprisingly, given conditions of living, land tenure, and employment in the countryside, Guatemala has experienced massive urban expansion since the 1940s. Extreme rural overpopulation has fueled cities' growth. Historically, centers such as Guatemala City or Antigua Guatemala were havens for the privileged. Their populations were limited to the few who ran church and state, those who controlled the economy, and those who served the powerful most directly. In contemporary Guatemala, no matter how much the elite might have their resources scattered throughout the country, their social life is centered in the nation's capital. The city, however, is increasingly marked by the presence and growing number of rural-urban migrants. Despite wide differences in wealth among city dwellers, they are, as a group, more fortunate than rural inhabitants. They enjoy higher rates of literacy and school attendance, longer life expectancy, and better schools, sanitation, and public services than those who live in the countryside (see Education; Health, this ch.). The press on the agricultural land base has been transferred to urban employment and services. According to the National Housing Bank (Banco Nacional de Vivienda), in 1975 Guatemala had a housing deficit of nearly 675,000 units, the 1976 earthquake destroyed another quarter-million homes. Official estimates project the (mostly urban) housing deficit to reach nearly 2 million by the end of the century. By the early 1980s unemployment and underemployment in Guatemala City had reached proportions reminiscent of the countryside.

The precise magnitudes of urban growth are difficult to estimate. There were significant increases from the 1950s through the early 1970s. In 1950 some one-quarter of all Guatemalans lived in cities, by 1973 over one-third did. From the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s the urban population expanded an average of 4.7 percent annually, cities grew roughly two and one-half times. In absolute terms the department of Guatemala dominated urban growth. Guatemala City was beyond a doubt the country's primate city, accounting in the mid-



1970s for nearly half the total urban populace. The city doubled its population between 1921 and 1950 and did so again in half that time (1950-64).

Rural migrants have swelled the ranks of urban middle- and lower class occupations. Children of the more well-to-do provincial landowners, merchants, and professionals have migrated to the capital for both employment and education. In the early 1980s the holders of middle- and upper mid-level white-collar jobs were heavily rural in origin. Similarly, children of the more prosperous peasants have found work in established enterprises (which paid the established minimum wage and offered some social benefits), low-ranking clerical positions, and government employment. Those less fortunate, who arrived in the city with neither the rudiments of an education nor a nonagricultural employment record, faced more limited opportunities. They joined the ranks of the city's construction crews, its self-employed craftsmen, and its peddlers. Construction work was often temporary, particularly in the early 1980s as the building boom that followed the 1976 earthquake wound down and economic hard times set in. Craftsmen and peddlers were increasingly disadvantaged in the growing competition they faced from the availability of cheap manufactured goods.

Squatter settlements accompanied the city's expansion. Until the early 1970s they were not the haven of the recently arrived rural-urban migrant. Instead, city natives and migrants with several years' urban residence used illegal squatter settlements as a solution to the housing crunch at a certain point in their work careers. Typically, a working-class family having difficulties either making ends meet or finding an adequate dwelling within its means chooses a squatter settlement as the easiest and least expensive housing alternative. Land invasions are normally well-planned events, and those who take part in them have considerable experience of the area in which they are settling. Recent migrants may eventually form a part of the squatter community, but they are usually relatives sharing housing with earlier invaders. Shantytowns require little capital outlay; residents frequently have plots large enough to permit a little gardening and livestock raising. Legal settlements are the choice of recent migrants, particularly those without their families or with few children, and older, more established families whose children are grown and contributing to the household income. Urban housing choices conform to the family's domestic cycle: couples begin and end in legal settlements, spending their middle years in shantytowns.

Ladinos predominate among migrants to the largest cities. In the mid-1960s, for example, 5 percent of migrants to Guatemala City were Indians or considered themselves Indian. Surveys a decade later found that roughly 15 percent of all migrants listed one or both parents as Indians. The changes that the rural ladino must make in occupation and style of living are far less significant than those an Indian migrant faces. For an Indian, permanent migration to a large city means speaking a new language, adopting a different style of dress, and changing

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

religious practices, if not beliefs. Indians frequently find little in common with national identity; their own cultural ethos is inextricably linked to their natal communities. Any lengthy absence undermines the male Indian migrant's ability to take part in the civil-religious hierarchy that forms the core of traditional religious practice. Practically speaking, the Indian migrants' success in the city is linked to their ability to "pass," i.e., to speak Spanish well and look like a ladino.

When Indians do migrate, the pattern differs from that typical of ladinos. Indian women are less prominent among migrants than their ladino counterparts; when Indian women do migrate, it is more commonly to accompany a husband than to seek urban employment themselves. Indian parents fear their daughters will not be adequately chaperoned in the city; Indian women have not flocked to urban domestic service the way ladino women have. Male migrants have frequently been introduced to the city through military service or marketing agricultural produce. Migrants go through a lengthy period when they maintain their ties with their villages. An individual may leave his family with relatives in his natal community for years on end. Indeed many, if not most, migrants begin urban employment with an eye simply to accumulating enough capital to set up housekeeping in their home communities. The village is the focus of the individual's loyalties; returning there is an enduring ambition.

Guatemala City draws most of its migrants from small to mid-sized towns, not from the most thoroughly rural regions. More than one-half of migrants surveyed had done nonagricultural work before coming to the city; they were by no means highly skilled, but their work histories typically included an apprenticeship in a traditional craft or some experience peddling. Their educational attainments placed them midway between the provincial ladino population and natives of Guatemala City.

Women form the majority of ladino migrants; their employment opportunities in larger cities are vastly better than those they might encounter in their natal communities or on coastal plantations. Middle- and upper middle-class city dwellers arrange to have relatives living in rural areas seek out potential migrants to work as domestic servants for them. Women migrants make the transition to city living in a single move; their employment is usually prearranged for them. By contrast, men make several moves before arriving at their final destination. Whereas women's families normally aid and abet them in migrating, men often find that domestic discord is the "push" cityward. Disagreements over a dwindling family inheritance may be the determining factor in a young man's decision to seek his fortune in the city.

Friends and relatives play a critical role in successful urban migration. An earlier generation of migrants made their way to the city largely unaided, but in the early 1980s the majority had contacts in the city before they migrated. Relatives are particularly helpful, providing at least short-term housing and offering advice about employment. A surprising number of migrants (indeed, of lower class individuals

in general) maintain patron-client relations. The lower echelons of the police and military who may be transferred several times before coming to the capital find the assistance of an officer invaluable. Patron-client relationships can take a variety of forms in the urban setting. Construction laborers look to engineers in charge of forming labor gangs to provide them with work; peddlers count on wealthier merchants for credit and advances of merchandise.

The annual volume of rural-urban migration rises or falls with economic hard times or unrest and violence in the countryside. The early 1980s reportedly saw an unusual rise in the number of Indians migrating to large cities because, as observers noted, Indians faced danger in heading for coastal plantations in the midst of the general climate of rural unrest. The strain on urban services, housing, and employment was significant, the more so given the country's worsening economic situation.

### **Family and Kinship**

Family and kin play a pervasive role in the individual's life. Church, school, and state may be limited in their impact on daily life, but not so kith and kin, who are the main educators many rural youngsters know and who are virtually the sole dependable source of help. For the Indian in particular there is simply no place for an individual who is not a member of the related families who comprise a community.

Guatemalans recognize a duty to succor one's relatives in their need. In searching for a job, a person counts on assistance from kin. The successful individual can expect to be besieged by requests from relatives for assistance; good fortune should benefit cousins, uncles, and aunts as well as siblings, parents, and children. Trust and loyalty are ideally centered on close kin. Family and relatives should present a united front to society at large; dissension between kin should be kept to a minimum.

Among ladinos the nuclear family is most prevalent, but a moderately prosperous household often expands to include other relatives, favored servants, or orphaned children. Sometimes a couple may take a child into their home and grant the child many privileges usually reserved for their own children but not legally adopt the youngster. Indian godchildren or illegitimate offspring of the male head of household may be included.

A series of extended families forms the basis of the Indian community. There is strong emphasis on village and ethnic endogamy—spouses are encouraged to choose mates from their own linguistic group and village. Interethnic marriage, though it occurs, is disparaged by both Indians and ladinos. Individuals may not marry close kin; unions of first cousins are frowned on. Beyond these strictures young people have considerable leeway in their choice of mates. Although parents play a role in concluding an agreement between the two families, actual arranged marriages, where the individuals have no say in the choice of their partners, are rare. Over several generations endogamy creates the extensive network of complex and interwoven kinship ties that

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

underlies village social relations. An individual can usually trace some kinship link to most other villagers.

Recently married couples typically live with the husband's parents. If possible they are given a separate room after the birth of their first child, but living arrangements vary depending on the family's resources and how well the wife gets along with her new in-laws. If the husband's family is poor and his in-laws have no other children, the husband may reside with his wife's family.

Residence patterns reflect inheritance: sons receive shares in their father's landholdings, but these are doled out over the years. The gradual process whereby the inheritance is disbursed puts brothers in competition with each other; in addition, it makes a young man dependent on his father's goodwill for much of his adult life. Traditionally, a man had only two alternatives: to migrate in search of coastal wage labor (not a favored choice) or to maintain reasonably congenial relations with his father. Within this scheme of things setting up the family as a separate nuclear household was the major event in the family's domestic cycle.

Traditional values emphasize respect for and deference to elders, especially male elders and, above all, one's father. So too do indigenous religious practices and beliefs; Indian worship is, in many respects, based on ancestor worship (see *Indigenous Belief Systems*, this ch.). The extent to which relative age serves as an organizing principle in family relations can hardly be overstated. The Mayan-Quiché languages have no separate term for *brother* without specifying older or younger brother. There is a specific term for the youngest son—the child who typically cares for the parents in their declining years.

The 1960s and 1970s saw a series of changes that reduced the "gerontocratic-patriarchal" authority older males wielded over younger ones. The simple lack of enough land to provide an adequate inheritance for all sons meant that young men in most families had less incentive to remain within their parents' household. Cash cropping, marketing, transport, wage labor, and crafts production were frequently in the hands of younger males. Young men, in any event, faced little disadvantage relative to their elders in entering these fields. Overall, economic changes meant that sons were no longer exclusively dependent on their fathers for gaining the means to earn their livelihood. At the same time, the ability to speak, read, and write Spanish grew in importance. This also struck at the elders' control, because younger men were more frequently literate and bilingual.

Civil ceremonies, church weddings, and common-law or consensual unions are all socially recognized forms of marriage. Since 1956 the government has permitted priests to conduct the civil proceedings, thus limiting the time and expense participants face. Nonetheless, the expense of the formal ceremony, along with the festivities that accompany it, is a major factor in limiting the number of legal unions. In the mid-1970s more than one-half of all reported marriages were consensual unions. In common-law marriages of at least three years' duration either



*National Theater, Guatemala City  
Courtesy Museum of Modern Latin American Art*

partner has the right to petition for legal recognition of the union, which confers the same rights as civil marriage. Both common-law and formal marriage call for alimony and child support payments upon dissolution.

Among middle- and upper class ladinos a formal marriage ceremony is a social must. The religious ceremony is valued as well by lower class ladinos and some Indians. It is considered a proper way to mark a well-established marriage between a couple that is happily united and moderately successful financially. For other Indians religious marriage marks the couple's conversion to Protestantism or Roman Catholicism. It serves as a public proclamation that the pair have forsaken the "pagan" indigenous beliefs and practices.

Divorce is legal but not commonly resorted to. It remains socially unacceptable for most middle- and upper class ladinos (the only ones who might be able to afford it in any event). In these strata unhappy unions are rarely dissolved, although a few have challenged religious strictures and social disapproval. Little social disapprobation accrues to the ladino male who engages in extramarital affairs; the double standard is commonly accepted in such matters. If financially able, he may even maintain a second family. Consensual unions are often tenuous in their early years; couples separate with little social stigma.

The husband is the head of the family. In the ladino home he is also the center of attention and authority; wife and children accede to his

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

demands. He makes all major decisions for the household and represents the family in public life. Domestic matters he usually leaves to his wife, although he will deal with his children in cases of major breaches of discipline. A man conducts his own social and business life largely without consulting his wife. He may have extramarital affairs without facing social censure, but he is expected to support the children, whom he acknowledges as his own. A father's duty demands that he supply the economic necessities for the family and see to his children's education. Ideally, he should be honorable and just. If these conditions are satisfied, his wife and children owe him unquestioning loyalty and obedience.

In middle- and upper class families the home is the center of the woman's existence; her social life is limited to church-sponsored events and visits with close friends. She rarely participates in her husband's political or economic activities. Ideally, she should not work outside the home, for to do so would reflect unfavorably on her spouse's ability to support the family. Within the domestic sphere, however, her authority is considerable. Her husband normally leaves all household affairs, the supervision of servants, and the major portion of child rearing to her.

This ideal is perforce weaker in lower class ladino families where economic necessity forces women to contribute to the family's subsistence. Many families cling to the ideal upper class pattern of family and marital relations, but the pressures of modern life have made this ideal remote from common practice. Even in lower class homes, however, the women defers to her husband in all major decisions and retains her central role in domestic matters.

This pattern of authority and sex roles is less pronounced in Indian families. The Indian woman plays a significant economic role in the family's subsistence. There are instances where daughters have taken over part of their fathers' businesses. In one case, an Indian woman ran the only trucking firm in town, while her brother organized a bus line to the nearest city. Husbands normally consult their wives about family decisions.

Children are much desired and highly valued. Barrenness is grounds for dissolving a marriage. Despite high population growth and the diminishing inheritance that parents can give their children, large families continue to be a sought-after cultural ideal. In surveys asking people why they did not use contraceptives, the desire for a large family ranked second only to fear of social disapproval. Nearly half of those surveyed wanted three or four children; roughly 30 percent, five or six.

Indians preferred larger families than ladinos: 80 percent wanted five or six offspring. Even prosperous Indians wanted four or five children. Youngsters play a significant role in family production from the age of six or seven. They run errands, gather firewood, clean, and take care of younger siblings. Initially, there is little sexual differentiation in the chores, though boys tend to range farther from home.

Males eventually spend more and more of their time with their fathers in agricultural work, and their sisters take over household tasks.

Having a son is important for ladinos and some, although not all, groups of Indians. Parents frequently keep having children in order to have an adequate reservoir of males to reach adulthood. A majority believe that family planning is against God's will; this is more salient for Indians than ladinos. Religious beliefs, however, correlate more weakly with actual contraceptive use than with either fear of social disapproval or the desire for children.

Some studies have found ignorance of the various contraceptive alternatives to be the greatest single factor in low usage. Parents' values may be less at issue than the sheer unavailability of reliable modern contraceptives. The high proportion of maternal mortality due to septic abortions, roughly one-half in the late 1970s, would bear this out. For whatever reasons, however, the use of contraceptives is limited. Less than 20 percent of child-bearing women use some form of contraception. Use is highest among ladinos of the department of Guatemala. Among Indians of the interior the percentage falls to 4 percent.

Guatemalan women aged 15 to 45 years had on average 3.4 live births in the late 1970s. The rate was lowest, as might be expected, in the heavily urban department of Guatemala; it rose precipitously for rural women—ladinos and Indian alike. The most striking differences in fertility and fecundity were not in the numbers of children born alive but in those surviving. Approximately 90 percent of the children of mothers living in the department of Guatemala survived, roughly 80 percent of those of rural women. The lowest survival rates were for older rural Indian women; younger Indian women have closed this gap.

Community field studies reveal more detailed information on the reproductive decisions families make. The birth rate in most communities has declined in response to an earlier decline in mortality (see Health, this ch.). Lengthy breast-feeding is the primary means parents use to space their children. Indians breast-feed longest: nearly 70 percent of Indian mothers, some 40 percent of rural ladinos, but less than 20 percent of ladino women in the department of Guatemala nurse their children for two years. If a child dies within its first year, the mother tries to become pregnant again as soon as possible. Surviving children, however, are spaced as far apart as is feasible. In Indian communities the birth rate seems to be linked to the nature of the community's resources. Villages relying primarily on coastal wage labor normally have higher birth rates than those where such migration is limited, although where local production is labor intensive, this trend is sometimes reversed.

*Compadrazgo* (godparenthood) plays a role for both ladinos and Indians. It includes nonrelatives in a kin-like relationship in a society where kin are considered the most, if not the only, trustworthy individuals. *Compadrazgo* creates a relationship between the parents and godparents of the child, as well as between the child and the godpar-

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

ents. Godparents are chosen at baptism, although ladinos tend to reinforce this tie with the godparents' participation at the youngster's confirmation and marriage. Godparents have an obligation to assist the parents and their godchildren in need. An equal, or a social superior, is normally chosen. In the case of a social superior, *compadrazgo* serves as a form of patron-client relationship. Poorer Indians may ask ladinos to be godparents to their children, but ladinos virtually never ask Indians. The suggestion evokes the sort of negative reaction that inter-ethnic marriages do.

## **Religion**

### **Indigenous Belief Systems**

Most Indians adhere to a syncretic set of beliefs that combines elements of Mayan and Roman Catholic ritual and mixes the aboriginal pantheon with Catholic saints. The ancient Mayan calendar plays a prominent role; ancestor veneration and the respect of living elders are central. An individual does good and the community ensures its general welfare by performing the requisite rites and fiestas and by maintaining good relations with relatives and neighbors.

Until Roman Catholic missionaries became active in the Highlands in the 1950s, most Indians had little sense even of the existence of an orthodox Catholicism different from their own particular variant; they thought of themselves as Catholic. Local ladinos, although they were ignorant of the substance of Indian beliefs, castigated them as "pagan." Religion is much more central to Indian men than to ladino men. Indian men are the key participants in the community's ritual life, whereas ladino men typically leave the domain of religion to women and children, contenting themselves to be baptized, married, and buried in the church (see Regional and Ethnic Diversity, this ch.).

The Indian pantheon is complex and stratified; the deities and supernatural beings are varied, and they frequently have both Mayan and Hispanic names (though the spirits bearing them may have little resemblance to the Catholic entities of the same name). The main deities include a remote and inaccessible high god; subservient to him is a matrimonial couple, called variously Jesus and Mary or the sun and the moon. Several lower ranking deities (such as the cloud god and the storm god) outrank the next level of supernaturals—saints and angels. At the lowest level are the ancestral spirits of the village families.

According to Mayan cosmology the high god formerly took a much more active part in the affairs of the world. During this epoch the earth's inhabitants angered him, and he resolved to destroy them by flood and fire. Some, however, managed to survive, and he forgave them. They became lower ranking deities charged with keeping account of the earth's next inhabitants, to wit, humans. When humans are impious, these deities ask the high god to punish those who err.

A strong sense of the duality of the universe is a common theme interwoven in much mythology and ritual. Christian personages and



doctrines are adapted to and reinterpreted in the light of Indian concerns and values. In Holy Week rituals, for example, Jesus is a secondary figure. Judas is much more prominent; he is normally a ladino portrayed variously as an exploitive merchant, the guardian of fertility, or a despised enemy. Ethnic relations, especially Indian views of ladinos, are a frequent motif. Ladinos are portrayed as wild animals; they are wealthier and more powerful than Indians but their moral inferiors. Because Indian beliefs are part of a strongly localized oral tradition, the basic elements are reproduced in a multitude of variants. Indigenous belief lacks an orthodoxy and a supracommunity focus.

Most worship continues to be organized through and performed by the community's civil-religious hierarchy. The hierarchy consists of a series of ranked offices; each has a specific set of civil or religious duties associated with it. The officeholders are males; the various grades are organized into *cofradías* (ritual brotherhoods). The actual number of ranks in the hierarchy varies; typically there are 10 to 12. Service in the *cofradías*, which are slowly disappearing, was traditionally an indispensable part of manhood. In the traditional system the *cofradías* were the only legitimate route to attain status within the community. Men spent much of their adult lives passing through the various grades. Service began at roughly 15 years of age and continued until those with sufficient wealth reached the highest grades, about 40 to 50 years. Thereafter, they were considered elders and played a prominent and influential role in community affairs.

Service, especially in the higher offices, requires a significant outlay in time and money. Indians refer to their duties as a *cargo* (burden), as indeed they are. Fiestas, which are the major form of public worship, are elaborate, expensive events, accompanied by extensive feasting and entertaining. The family that sponsors such an event faces a substantial drain on its resources. Much of this can be accumulated by a household with adequate land and labor, because the appointments to the most important offices are made years in advance. There remain, however, major cash outlays for liquor, candles, fireworks, and bands. Estimates of the sponsors' expenses from divers Highland communities found the costs to be roughly equal to a year's wages.

Beyond the expense and labor, *cargos* involve socially sensitive duties. Civil duties include minor police matters, such as dealing with drunks. Because nearly everyone is drunk at one time or another, the *cargo* holder must be careful not to alienate relatives and neighbors. The village can formally sanction officeholders if their actions are found wanting, and the *cargo* bearer's actual powers are few. Further, the officeholder who sponsors a fiesta represents the village before deities who can punish ritual misconduct. Moreover, sponsorship demands a lengthy period of sexual abstinence. Sponsors are blamed when the weather is poor or the crops fail; it is then commonly held that they must have slept with their wives during their year's term of office.

Despite its patent drawbacks sponsorship was an avidly sought-after honor—at least until the 1950s. Major offices were allocated years in

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

advance; well-to-do families fought for the right to sponsor a large-scale village fiesta. Underwriting one was the only legitimate forum for the display of wealth and virtually the only way to gain prestige. Indians were excluded from effective participation in national political and economic life, and the civil-religious hierarchy provided an alternative outlet for the ambitious. There were those reluctant to participate, however, particularly after the system began to change in the 1950s and 1960s but they could be coerced through gossip or, with the connivance of local ladinos, threatened with incarceration.

The efforts of Catholic and Protestant missionaries in Highland communities altered the situation. Catholics especially drew their converts from the younger male population. Their defection from the ranks of the *cofradías* and their frequent intolerance of traditional fiestas introduced a new element of strain in community relations. To the devout their disrespect of the elders tempted fate. Equally important, those who converted were frequently from wealthier families—exactly those who, years hence, might have been expected to sponsor the major fiestas.

The converts were explicit in their criticisms of the *cargo* system. At the lower grades they disliked the civil duties that were little more than unpaid menial chores for local ladinos holding government posts. At the upper levels they represented a drain on community resources. Fiestas were viewed as pagan events associated with public drunkenness and sexual license.

Overall, the competing world views introduced an element of doubt about the efficacy of traditional modes of worship. In one community a *cargo* holder lost two of his children during his period of office. One faction saw this misfortune as proof of his bad faith in accepting the office; another, as proof of the futility of fiestas.

The decline of the civil-religious hierarchy and the *cofradías* strikes deeply at the warp and weave of the traditional Indian community and has elicited vehement responses. There have been violent confrontations between missionaries, especially priests, and traditional believers. There has been further conflict over who should have access and when to local chapels and churches, over who should care for ritual paraphernalia, and over who should celebrate the town patron's feast.

Economic changes, too, have forced a readjustment in the pattern of celebrating fiestas. In well-to-do villages other opportunities for investment have begun to compete with fiestas for surplus production. There are children to be educated, trucks and stores to be bought, and inventories and marketing channels to be expanded. In more marginal villages poverty and the decline in the standard of living have forced a curtailment of traditional fiestas. Villages have cut their costs by limiting the number of occasions celebrated, combining offices, and substituting joint for individual sponsorship.

#### **Roman Catholicism**

The majority of Guatemalans, roughly 80 percent in the early 1980s, are at least nominally Roman Catholic. Catholicism came with the

### *The Society and Its Environment*

Spanish conquest and forms an integral part of the country's Hispanic heritage. The proper role for the Catholic church was the key issue dividing Liberals and Conservatives in the decades following independence (see *Central American Independence*, ch. 1). Among Liberals an anti-Catholic bent persisted long after any other pretext to liberal doctrine was abandoned; it imbued Guatemalan Catholicism with anticlerical overtones that persist to the present. The church's institutional organization suffered under the Liberal regimes of the late nineteenth century. Monastic orders were interdicted, church property was seized, foreign clergy were deported, native priests were forbidden to wear clerical garb in public, and religious schools were nationalized. The church concentrated on maintaining the bare bones of a formal organization; it sought to obviate enforcement of at least some of the anticlerical laws. Its presence in most of the country—certainly among the Indians of the Highlands—was virtually nonexistent.

The Catholic church entered the post-World War II era institutionally handicapped. The shortage of priests was extreme; this limited the actual impact the church had on the lives of most Guatemalans, their formal adherence to Catholicism notwithstanding. Indians followed their own belief system (see *Indigenous Belief Systems*, this ch.). Urban ladinos were more or less conventional in their understanding of Catholic doctrine; rural ladinos believed in a kind of folk Catholicism derived from beliefs current in the Iberian Peninsula in the sixteenth century. Although Indians shared many of the tenets and assumptions of folk Catholicism, it was and is distinct from the Indians' own rituals and beliefs, the substance of which ladinos are largely ignorant. Rural and urban ladino alike value the church's rituals, but the constant shortage of priests means that routine church attendance is rarely possible. Most are baptized, but many skip confirmation and a church wedding. A mass and novena customarily mark the individual's death.

The church's juridical status improved significantly in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The government viewed Catholicism as a bulwark against communism and eased the more troublesome of the antichurch measures. The 1956 constitution permitted religious instruction in public schools, and the 1965 constitution enabled clergy to perform civil marriages. Throughout the period the numbers of clergy and dioceses grew. The expansion both strengthened the church's formal organizational apparatus and limited the hegemony of the archdiocese of Guatemala City.

Despite increases in the numbers of clergy and religious, the church remained woefully understaffed. In the mid-1970s there were only 500-odd priests in the country—a ratio to the faithful of only one to nearly 5,900, substantially less than that of many other Latin American countries. More significant was the preponderance of foreigners among the clergy. Both the Maryknoll order and the Jesuits had maintained a small presence in the country since the late 1930s and early 1940s. By the mid-1970s, however, approximately 80 percent of all priests

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

and 90 percent of all religions were foreigners. The bulk came from the United States, Canada, Spain, and Italy.

Foreign clergy were particularly active in rural, predominantly Indian, regions. Their presence and success in Highland communities contributed to the rapidly changing social scene: the split between Indians who practiced the traditional rituals of their own syncretic religion and those who adhered to orthodox Catholicism became a major division within the Indian populace (see *Regional and Ethnic Diversity*, this ch.). "Conversion," comments anthropologist Waldemar Smith, "is the most important social movement in the contemporary community, and religious orthodoxy is becoming a major institutional link between the remote community and Guatemalan society." The very presence of missionaries offers Indians reluctant to participate in traditional religious offices an alternative mode of worship as well as support in defying the community elders. Another anthropologist recorded an incident in which a young convert to Catholicism was jailed by local ladinos (at the behest of the Indian elders) for his refusal to participate in the civil-religious hierarchy. The resident missionary helped the young man to obtain legal counsel, and the courts upheld the Indian's right not to participate. The example was not lost on other families anxious to avoid the time and expense of traditional rituals. Beyond this, Catholic missionaries have been explicitly critical of the subservient position of Indians vis-à-vis ladinos and have provided converts a theological rationale for redressing the social balance. Priests have been active in organizing cooperatives, assisting their parishioners in literacy campaigns, and educating Indian children. They have, thereby, run afoul of local ladinos as well as the traditional Indian elders.

Foreign clergy frequently have access to their own sources of funds; they are less dependent on the support and largess of the Guatemalan middle and upper classes. This and their overwhelming numerical predominance have widened the rift between national and foreign clergy. Native priests have oriented their activities toward routine church duties; their clientele have been the ladino urban middle and upper social strata. This has been nowhere more apparent than in their commitment to Catholic education: in the 1970s some 40 percent of all Roman Catholic schools and 55 percent of Catholic secondary schools were in Guatemala City.

The 1970s and early 1980s found the Catholic church increasingly estranged from the government; many clergy were vociferous in their criticism of the status quo. The church, long ready to acquiesce in whatever the privileged wished in return for minimal concessions, became, in the wake of the Second Vatican Council, a more dubious supporter of the established social order. There was a sense that Christianity demanded more than virulent anticommunism and that failure to observe the most rudimentary demands of social justice was hardly more compatible with Christianity than atheistic Marxism—a theme highlighted by Pope John Paul II's speeches during his March 1983 visit to the country.



*Street in Chichicastenango*



*Street in Chichicastenango  
Courtesy Adelfa Fernandez*

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

This concern with social equity was hardly popular with the society's powerful and rich. Catholic clergy suffered reverses: those sympathetic to the government denounced them for their alleged leftist sympathies. Foreign clergy were liable to deportation, a situation that underscored the church's vulnerability. In contrast to Protestant congregations, Catholic parishes were unable to sustain their ritual life in the absence of a priest. Much of the church's missionary work in rural areas was jeopardized, and clergy themselves were endangered by the unrest of the early 1980s. Some 10 to 15 priests and religious were murdered in the escalating violence; Catholic catechists were frequent targets as well.

Pope John Paul II's visit underscored the gulf between the regime and Roman Catholics as well as the differences among evangelicals, mainline Protestants, and Catholics. Conventional Protestants participated in the ceremonies associated with the visit. Fundamentalists were far less ecumenical; some evangelical pastors denounced the pope as the beast of the Apocalypse and the anti-Christ. The pope castigated the country's "flagrant injustices" and characterized violations of human rights as a "very grave offense against God." He called for better protection of Indians and demanded that Catholic religious be permitted to pursue their pastoral work unimpeded.

#### **Protestantism**

Protestantism in Guatemala dates from the late nineteenth century, when President Justo Rufino Barrios invited Protestant missionaries to proselytize. The invitation was part of his regime's anti-Catholic policies. Baptists and Methodists from the United States opened small missions in the 1920s and 1930s. Until the end of World War II, however, Protestants played a minor role in the country's religious life.

The pace of missionary activity increased in the 1940s and 1950s. By the next decade there was a small core of Protestants. The convert was most typically an ambitious lower middle-class ladino. Protestantism's strong emphasis on self-improvement offered a rationale for striving for upward mobility. For an individual in transition, membership in a Protestant church gave a focus of identity outside conformity to traditional social values. It legitimized the individual's efforts to better his lot in life.

Like their Catholic counterparts, Protestant missionaries continue to offer adherents to indigenous beliefs another choice. Indian converts show a pattern similar to that of ladinos. Protestantism provides an alternative to the traditional means of self-aggrandizement. It is ideal for the ambitious individual who is unable to become a curer, i.e., a religious healer, or to afford the higher *cargo* offices. As with conversion to formal Catholicism, it implies a radical break with the more traditional members of the community and is therefore a source of factionalism. Its emphasis on abstemiousness and sobriety puts converts at odds with many Indians. In common with Catholicism, Protestant conversion also implies restructuring relations between ladinos and

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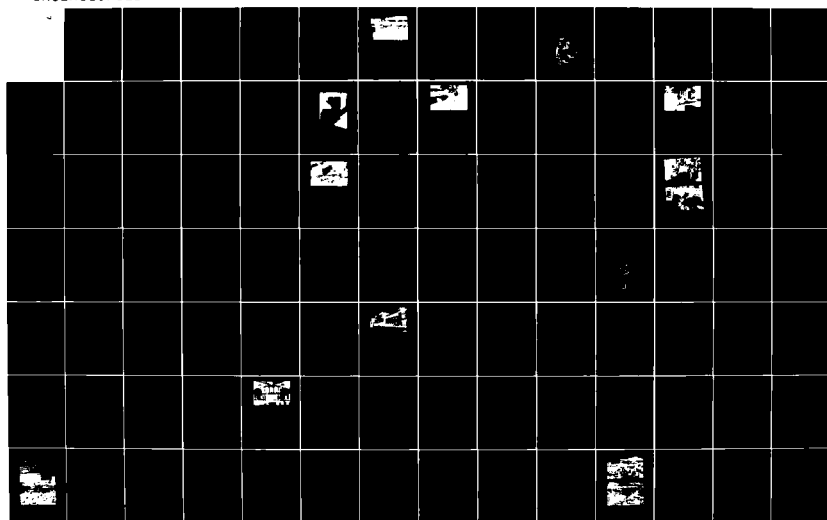
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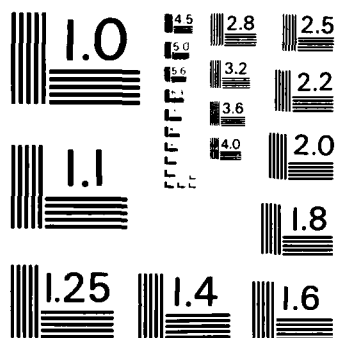
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MICROCOPY RESOLUTION TEST CHART  
NATIONAL BUREAU OF STANDARDS-1963-A



Indians: all are equal before the Lord. Protestants even countenance interethnic marriage, although the small pool of confessionally correct potential spouses in rural communities may be a factor.

There was a significant surge in the numbers of converts after the 1976 earthquake. By early 1983 Protestants claimed over 20 percent of the total population. In some sects membership was growing at a rate of 20 to 30 percent annually. In contrast to earlier converts most of the new faithful joined evangelical fundamentalist sects. The influence of mainline Protestant groups waned.

Evangelicals are not oriented toward doctrinal orthodoxy; they emphasize the individual believer's direct personal relationship to God. In contrast to mainline Protestants and Roman Catholics, who have come to see redressing the social scales as essential to any widely shared improvement in the lives of the faithful, evangelicals are highly individualistic in focus. They are less concerned with organizing an elaborate institutional infrastructure than with preaching the Word to society as a whole.

Evangelical congregations themselves have a marked tendency to fragment. Sometimes ethnic differences play a role, for example, when an Indian congregation is desirous of breaking away from a ladino preacher. The emphasis on a personal calling to preach the Lord's word, as opposed to years of theological training that mainline Protestant groups require, facilitates this process. There has been a veritable mushrooming of different sects and spinoff congregations. It is not unusual to find even relatively small communities divided into Catholic, mainline Protestant, and several fundamentalist congregations. In the early 1980s Chimaltenango, a department capital, had over 30 distinct sects, and throughout the country there were nearly 6,800 Protestant congregations divided among more than 100 denominations.

Several factors figure in the sharp increase in the number of evangelical believers. Numerous political and military rightists assert that many Catholics, especially the clergy, are little better than "fellow travelers" of the leftist guerrillas. Potential converts find it safer to be affiliated with a Protestant sect. The Catholics' concern with social reform made them targets of violence, and the church hierarchy withdrew priests from the Highlands for their personal safety. Some observers reported, however, that the bishop who ordered the withdrawals was criticized within the hierarchy and was replaced.

Observers suggest that an unspecified portion of converts were economically or politically motivated (see *Religious Institutions*, ch. 4). This was especially true after President Ríos Montt, a member of an evangelical group known as the Church of the Word (*Iglesia del Verbo—El Verbo*), assumed power in March 1982. Even small sects have ties to North American congregations. In 1983 they remained able to marshal significant resources for their converts. The ability to offer food, medical care, or housing is a significant inducement to the impoverished. Protestant missionaries were able to enter the country as ag-

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

gricultural and technical advisers; Catholic clergy were more restricted. Protestants were particularly active in the wake of the 1976 earthquake and the 1980s conflicts involving the military, paramilitary groups, and guerrillas.

### **Education**

Guatemala will continue to be handicapped by an extremely high illiteracy rate for several decades; according to official estimates, in the mid-1970s roughly one-half of all adults could not read and write a paragraph in Spanish. The magnitude of the problem was evident in examining the work force: more than two-thirds of the agricultural and one-third of the industrial labor force were illiterate.

Approximately 60 percent of adult women were unable to read and write. Literacy rates in rural Guatemala were approximately one-half those of cities; about 70 percent of the urban populace was classified as literate, only 30 percent of the rural. Indians were at the bottom of the scale. They faced a triple disadvantage: they were rural, poor, and nonnative speakers of Spanish. Some 80 percent were illiterate. This overall literacy rate masked significant variation among the various linguistic groups. Samples in the 1970s found that a scant 10 percent of Kekchi speakers were literate in comparison with nearly 30 percent of Quiché speakers. There were as well substantial regional differences in literacy rates. More than one-half of all ladinos in the south could read and write; less than 40 percent of those in the east could do so.

Public expenditures for education were low through the early 1970s. Guatemala ranked lowest of all Central American countries in terms of percentage of gross national product (GNP) devoted to public education and second lowest in percentage of total public spending. Government spending, with the assistance of international agencies, increased later in the decade.

The rate of literacy reflected low school enrollments. In the mid-1970s less than one-quarter of the adult population had completed primary school, and less than 4 percent had finished secondary education. Roughly one-half of all primary-school-age children were enrolled in classes in the early 1970s; by 1980 the proportion had risen to as high as 65 to 70 percent. Low enrollments were coupled with high dropout rates. Approximately one-quarter of the students starting school completed the primary cycle.

As with so much of social life, rural Guatemalans were disadvantaged; three-quarters of urban and one-third of rural school-age children attended primary school in the 1970s. The percentage of rural children actually finishing school was even more marked than their low enrollment rate. Some 50 percent of urban first graders completed primary school, less than 5 percent of rural children did so. Children in the countryside were handicapped by the large number of schools that offered only the first three years of the six-year primary cycle.

Large numbers of the rural population, Indians, face a further disadvantage in that Spanish is not their native tongue. In the recent past

other factors discouraged Indians from attending school. Dress codes operated to the disadvantage of Indian girls (see *Regional and Ethnic Diversity*, this ch.). The few Indians who were able to attend were often subjected to harassment by ladino classmates. The increase in rural primary schools, although not enough to satisfy the needs of the populace, has led to a dramatic rise in the number of Indians attending school and made it easier for the present generation of Indian students.

The school system is divided into four levels. Two years of preprimary education are noncompulsory and affect only a minute portion of the preschool-age population. The compulsory six years of primary school are divided into two three-year cycles. Primary school is followed by six years of secondary education; the first three years are general, the second three more specialized. The second cycle can lead to a variety of postsecondary courses or university education. Teacher training, agricultural education, secretarial-clerical training, and health technician education are among the specialized programs. There are five universities; San Carlos (public) and Landivar (private) are the main institutions of higher education. The public school system is under the direction of the Ministry of Education. In the 1970s several autonomous committees were set up to oversee the development of new curricula, coordination with international agencies assisting in educational development, and training of scientific and technical personnel.

The educational system was hampered in the 1970s by a surplus of primary-school teachers; they were being turned out at a rate of roughly 2,500 annually early in the decade. At the same time, there was a shortage of adequately trained secondary-school teachers; some three-quarters of secondary teachers were certified only for primary school. Despite the variety of practical programs, the majority of secondary students were in courses too academically oriented to be of much use to a country in desperate need of mid-level technicians. University graduates were concentrated in economics, law, and the humanities—training hardly calculated to serve the country's development needs. Universities were also beset by a high dropout rate, related not only to the economic problems of many students but also to the unknown but large number of students and faculty members who had been assassinated.

In the late 1970s government programs sought to expand training of secondary teachers in practical curricula. Other priorities included improving nonformal and adult education. There were, in addition, efforts to step up the construction of rural schools and to develop a course of primary-school instruction to meet the needs of non-Spanish-speaking Indians. A 1981 law outlined an ambitious program to improve adult literacy.

## **Health**

Among Guatemala's principal health problems are the high mortality rate (especially among infants and children), the elevated incidence of infectious diseases, and extensive malnutrition among the poorer seg-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

ments of the population. All combine with high fertility and high population growth rates to worsen the situation of the poor and exacerbate the socioeconomic problems of the country. Although the death rate fell from roughly 35 per 1,000 at the turn of the century to some 12 to 15 per 1,000 in the late 1970s, the benefits of this drop have been by no means equally spread throughout the populace. In the late 1970s and early 1980s life expectancy at birth averaged approximately 60 years. Indians, however, could expect to live 10 to 15 years less than ladinos; rural Guatemalans, about 15 years less than ladino city dwellers. Indeed, among rural Indians and ladinos life expectancy was virtually equal.

High infant and childhood mortality accounted for the bulk of deaths. Some 35 percent of all infants died before the age of five. Deaths of the young (those under four years of age) accounted for some 55 percent of all mortality—a percentage that has remained roughly constant since at least the 1950s. In one study more than 80 percent of pre-adult mortality took place within the first three years of life; by the age of three a child had roughly a 90 percent chance of reaching adulthood. Official estimates put infant mortality at 66 per 1,000 live births. Other observers, noting that infant deaths were often not reported, put the rate much higher, in the range of 80 to 90 per 1,000 live births. Again, rural rates far outstripped those of cities: they ranged from 100 to as high as 160 per 1,000. Indian infant mortality rates averaged perhaps 1.7 times those of ladinos. One study of a Highland Indian community found an infant mortality rate of 200 per 1,000 live births.

Enteritis and other diarrheal diseases, influenza and respiratory ailments, and measles were the principal, direct causes of death. Together they accounted for more than 40 percent of all mortality. Poor sanitation and nutrition were implicated in the high rates of respiratory and intestinal-tract infections. Provision of basic services to the poorer half of the population was singularly deficient. In the mid-1970s roughly 40 percent had access to potable water; the disparity between rural and urban Guatemala was dramatic: 87 percent of those living in cities, but only 14 percent of those in the countryside, had potable water. Sewerage in rural areas was virtually nonexistent.

The population's nutritional status was less than adequate. The poorest 50 percent could normally afford perhaps 60 percent of the daily caloric minimum and roughly half the daily protein requirement. There is evidence that the diets of the poorest deteriorated from the mid-1960s through the mid-1970s.

Nutritional deficiencies were particularly significant among the young. There is a synergistic relationship between nutrition and the incidence of the infectious diseases that were the major direct causes of high death rates among the very young. Poor prenatal nutrition results in low birth weight; low birth weight is a critical component in infant mortality. In the early 1970s, when less than 7 percent of United States infants weighed less than 2.5 kilograms at birth, more than 40 percent of those in the Guatemalan countryside did.



*Medical students at Del Valle University, Guatemala City  
Courtesy David Mangurian, Inter-American Development Bank*

Nutritional deficiencies were evident in most of the deaths of children between the ages of two and six. In the late 1970s an estimated 80 percent of all children under five years of age suffered from some degree of malnutrition, and 30 percent were severely malnourished. Early mortality was highest where bottle-feeding was most common. Where breast-feeding was the norm, mortality rose later. Breast-fed infants were at higher risk during weaning, when inadequate supplements to maternal milk led to lowered immunity, coupled with increased exposure to intestinal ailments. The combination produced a new round of childhood deaths.

Health care was limited in the numbers of medical personnel and facilities available, a situation made worse by the extremely uneven distribution of health resources. There were, in the early 1980s, an estimated three physicians, two nurses, 7.6 technicians, and 21.5 hospital beds per 1,000 people. Most, however, were concentrated in the environs of Guatemala City. Having approximately 20 percent of the total population, the city had as many as 80 percent of the country's doctors and more than 40 percent of the dentists, nurses, and laboratory technicians.

Similar distortions were apparent in publicly funded spending on health care. In the late 1970s budgets of the Ministry of Public Health

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

and Social Welfare showed per capita expenditures in the department of Guatemala to be nearly three times the level of the rest of the country. Public health priorities were geared to curative medicine, which accounted for roughly 80 percent of spending. Expensive public hospitals in Guatemala City were the major recipients of these funds; preventive efforts received only minimal attention.

Access of the poor, especially the rural poor, to health care was severely limited. Experts estimated that, overall, the health resources available in most of the country were roughly half of those accessible within the department of Guatemala. Care was most constrained in the Highlands.

Improving rural health care was a major goal of the government in the 1970s. By the early 1980s more than 600 rural health centers had been built. Health education programs included efforts to train paramedics, midwives, and nurses' assistants. The notion was that paraprofessionals would both relieve the acute shortage of doctors and be more ready to work in rural areas. There was an innovative program in which health promoters, or *promotores*, and rural health technicians were being educated specifically in preventive medicine. Various kinds of health care units were designed to reach the rural populace and provide minimal medical assistance along with referrals for more elaborate medical care.

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The sociological and anthropological literature on contemporary Guatemala is spotty. Detailed anthropological community studies date from the 1930s through the early 1980s, but they are largely focused on the Highlands and the Indians living there. Information on the ladino populace and city dwellers is much more limited. Nathan Whetten's *Guatemala: The Land and the People* and Richard Adams' *Crucifixion by Power*, although dated, remain good overviews of the general configuration of Guatemalan society. Whetten has the further virtue of providing the general reader with a review of anthropological field studies through the late 1950s.

The books and articles by Waldemar Smith, Douglas Brintnall, Benjamin Colby and Pierre van den Berghe, and Benjamin and Lore Colby are among the many studies available that analyze contemporary social and religious change in Indian communities, as well as the dynamics of ethnic relations. Sheldon Smith describes the various kinds of *fincas* and the situation that the resident labor force on each faces. Roger Burbach and Patricia Flynn deal with that topic in detail for the Del Monte banana plantations in the southeast. Bryan Roberts' *Organizing Strangers* studies the life of the ladino poor in Guatemala City, and

*The Society and Its Environment*

William Demarest and Benjamin Paul present life histories of Indian rural-urban migrants. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 3. The Economy





*Effigy of a man with jar on his back. Kaminaljuyú*

**GUATEMALA BECAME** a developing country when the Spanish arrived in the early 1500s. In 1983 the country was still at an early stage of development. Gross domestic product (GDP) amounted to only about US\$9.3 billion in 1982, about US\$1,200 per capita. Income distribution was highly skewed, however, and a few thousand of the wealthy received a large part of the national income while much of the population subsisted on the equivalent of a few hundred dollars a year. President José Efraín Ríos Montt said in early 1983 that about 3 million people had incomes of less than US\$200 a year, another 2.5 million barely earned US\$450, while the roughly 2 million remaining by implication received the bulk of the national income. Poverty was widespread in rural areas, accompanied by malnutrition, illiteracy, and access to few social services.

In 1983 the country remained essentially agricultural. Farming contributed only about one-quarter of GDP but employed over one-half of the labor force. A small number of large estates produced commercial crops, largely for export, and accounted for most of the value of agricultural output. About 90 percent of the country's farms had only some 16 percent of the farmland. Most of these plots were too small to support a family at a bare subsistence level. Increasingly since the 1930s the subsistence farmer has had to turn to seasonal labor, often on the large estates and plantations, to eke out a living. In spite of substantial growth of the economy since the early 1950s, most observers in the early 1980s believed that many of the poor subsistence farmers had experienced declining real incomes because of population pressure on the land, loss of soil fertility, and erosion.

Industry developed during the mid-twentieth century. By the early 1980s it contributed a little less than one-fifth of GDP. Most manufacturing consisted of handicrafts and of small shops, and a few larger plants accounted for much of the value of industrial output. Most manufacturing was located near the capital, and production was concentrated on consumer goods, particularly food and beverages. The small domestic market, limited by population and the large number of people living a subsistence existence, handicapped the growth of manufacturing, especially industries based on economies of scale. In the 1960s industrial development spurted as a result of the larger common market formed by treaty between the Central American nations, resulting in a wider range of industrial products and growing exports from Guatemala. Small amounts of poor quality crude oil were discovered in the 1970s, and additional discoveries appeared likely. Guatemala has a large source of energy in numerous hydroelectric sites, but by 1983 only a fraction had been developed. Perhaps one-third of the population had access to electricity.

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

The government historically has maintained a small role in the economy. Development was left to private initiative. Governmental inactivity constituted a major reason for the slow and uneven development of the economy and skewed distribution of income. A planning organization has existed since 1954 that has pinpointed problems and suggested solutions, but more government investment and services required greater expenditures and revenues. Major tax reforms have usually failed to overcome the strong opposition of the wealthy. As a result, Guatemala had one of the lowest tax bases in the Americas; central government revenues amounted to less than 9 percent of GDP in 1977. Economists noted that property, including agricultural land, and personal incomes showed major potential for increased revenues. The government began to be an active participant in the country's economic and social development.

During the 1950s and 1960s substantial economic growth was achieved, ranking with the leading nations in Latin America. Much of the expansion was led by exports of primary agricultural products, particularly coffee, cotton, and sugar. By the mid-1970s difficulties appeared, largely reflecting an adverse shift in the terms of trade. A major earthquake in 1976 created considerable internal demand for goods and services associated with reconstruction and continuing investment, which masked the difficulties for a while. By 1978 the reconstruction boom had run its course, and more fundamental problems reemerged.

After 1977 the economy began a slide into a recession that saw GDP drop by perhaps as much as 3.5 percent in 1982. Many of the problems stemmed from foreign markets. The second oil crisis, of 1979-80, contributed to recessions in many of the countries that bought Guatemala's exports. Prices declined for Guatemala's main agricultural exports. Political instability, economic adversity, and a shortage of foreign exchange affected the country's important export markets in Central America. Inflation, mostly imported, increased prices in the Guatemalan economy. Domestic insurgency increasingly became the focus of government activities and a drain on available resources. The insurgency also disrupted the economy, greatly reducing income from tourists, adding to capital flight, and in 1982 creating a large refugee population that some observers estimated at over 1 million. In 1981 the country, desperately short of foreign exchange, imposed severe restrictions on imports and transfers of money and obtained a loan from the International Monetary Fund. Austerity contributed to the fall of GDP in 1982. Economists expected slow recovery in the next few years because of balance of payments constraints and the very small internal market. The level of insurgency also would be a major factor affecting the economy's future.

### **Growth and Structure of the Economy**

Since the arrival of the Spanish, Guatemala has had essentially two economies. The Spanish took large tracts of land and produced export crops, developed commercial links abroad, and imported foreign goods.

Indians not attached to the large estates cultivated small plots for family needs which, along with some handicrafts, provided an adequate subsistence living. Over the intervening centuries, these dual economies persisted, although there was some blurring of lines. Some non-Indians, who were eventually called *ladinos* (see Glossary), became poor subsistence farmers. A few Indians amassed some wealth or through education reached professional status while retaining their cultural identity with other Indians. Nonetheless, in 1983 a traditional economy existed alongside a more modern one.

The traditional economy consisted largely of subsistence farmers, using ancient farming practices, who participated in the money economy mostly through low-paying seasonal labor often on large commercial farms and plantations.<sup>1</sup> Not all of those in the traditional economy were Indians, but the bulk of the Indian population was in the traditional economy. The more modern economy included commercial farming, industry, transportation, finance, and commerce—basically those portions that used more or less modern techniques to increase productivity. The modern economy was monetized, and ownership was concentrated in a very small part of the population, almost entirely *ladino*. The traditional economy encompassed a majority of the population that farmed very small plots or were essentially landless agricultural workers. The gap between incomes of owners in the traditional and the modern economy was acutely distorted in the latter's favor. There was a small middle class, primarily urban, and a larger group of wage workers in numerous activities who had incomes and living standards of varying adequacy. Since colonial times prosperity for the country benefited the few much more than the bulk of the population. Because most of the population lived at a subsistence existence, the size of the internal market remained small.

Soon after the Spanish arrived, the country's prosperity became intimately linked to the demand for and the price of its agricultural export products in foreign markets. The economy grew in surges, reflecting high prices abroad or bountiful harvests that increased the quantity of exports. Changing conditions in foreign markets at times required switching to different crops. The introduction of coffee trees in the 1840s proved highly successful, and coffee soon became and remained in 1983 the country's most important export. After the introduction of coffee, new export crops, such as bananas, were added, or other products, such as cotton, sugar, and fresh beef, gained in importance because of conditions outside of the country. In the 1980s several agricultural products were chief exports, and there were potentially more, but the country's prosperity still remained closely linked to the volatile world prices of primary commodities.

The historically unequal distribution of incomes and wealth largely guided investment and economic development. Subsistence farmers used their labor to clear new land and erect houses. Major investments came primarily from the wealthy and usually went into export products and the ancillary facilities required to move them to market. In the

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

late 1800s a few foreign investors appeared who were willing to gamble on broader development. A relatively extensive railroad network and electricity for Guatemala City were started, encouraged by the government. In the early 1900s the United Fruit Company completed the rail line linking both coasts and the capital, built a modern port, and added bananas to the country's exports. The new facilities contributed to opportunities in commerce, finance, communications, and other activities to additional investors, many of whom had only modest sums.

In the first half of the twentieth century, economic growth remained largely based on exports for which the price and supply conditions rose and fell. The worldwide depression of the 1930s sharply curtailed exports and growth of the money economy. Nonetheless, opportunities opened for large and small entrepreneurs during the period. Investment in a few donkeys—and later trucks—for transport, in handicrafts, and in larger establishments using machinery yielded substantial returns. The two world wars, during which shipping was restricted, added incentives to domestic industry to produce substitutes for imported goods. In the 1930s and 1940s the government became interested in economic development, although its encouragement was spotty and was less than needed. Nevertheless, substantial expansion of manufacturing, finance, transportation, and additional services occurred.

By 1950 agriculture remained the largest sector of the economy, contributing 33 percent of GDP. Manufacturing contributed almost 12 percent of GDP, but mining and public utilities were less than 1 percent. Aside from farming, trade was the other large sector, contributing 26 percent. Trade plus all other services accounted for 53 percent of GDP, somewhat unusual for an underdeveloped economy.

Beginning in the 1940s a growing reporting system produced a variety of statistics for evaluating developments in the economy. Like many developing countries, Guatemala was usually slow in publishing statistics, which often encompassed changes that disrupted continuity and consistency and frequently contained inaccuracies. Economic data should be used with caution and not regarded as overly precise.

Economic expansion accelerated after the 1950s when it averaged only 3.5 percent a year in constant 1958 prices, only slightly higher than population growth. Roadbuilding in the Pacific coastal area, however, opened fertile fields that contributed to diversification and growth of export crops in ensuing decades. Also during the 1950s, the preparatory work for the Central American Common Market (CACM) set the stage for substantial industrial growth (see Manufacturing, this ch.). In the 1960s the economy grew at 5.5 percent a year in real terms, considerably higher than the average for Latin America. This growth was largely led by exports. Cotton and sugar joined coffee as important foreign exchange earners. The enlarged common market in Central America stimulated exports of manufactured products.

Rapid economic expansion continued in the 1970s in spite of major setbacks. Real GDP increased at 5.7 percent a year during the decade but slowed toward the end. The rapid rise of oil prices in 1974 was

one setback because until the late 1970s the country depended completely on imported oil (see Energy, this ch.). During the expansion of the 1960s the economy became more dependent on imports of a variety of semifinished and finished products, the prices of which generally rose after 1973 relative to Guatemala's major agricultural export products. In 1976 a major earthquake killed probably more than 30,000 people and left nearly one-fifth of the population homeless. Property damage was an estimated US\$750 million (not allowing for rising prices). The damage was equivalent to about 20 percent of GDP in 1975 or 18 months of normal fixed capital formation. The quake damaged some roads, the railroad and highway to the Caribbean coast, and Puerto Barrios, but most of the economy's productive facilities were left intact (see fig. 1).

During the 1970s economic growth resulted partly from internal demand. Although exports of the country's major agricultural products improved in some years and exports to CACM members generally held up during the decade, construction activity in the modern sector was a major stimulus from 1974 to 1978. Large government projects in roadbuilding, housing, and hydroelectric dams combined with substantial private investments in hotels for tourists, oil field development, and a large nickel smelter (foreign owned) to provide a base in addition to the reconstruction of earthquake damage. Real growth of value added in construction averaged nearly 25 percent a year between 1976 and 1978. Domestic cement production, in which the country was usually self-sufficient, increased rapidly, but serious shortages appeared, requiring imports and price and distribution controls. Labor shortages also appeared, although mostly for skilled workers, causing a temporary rise of wage rates.

At the end of the 1970s the economy began to experience severe difficulties. By 1979, when reconstruction had run its course, the second worldwide oil price crisis hit; it affected many areas of the world that bought Guatemala's exports and, among other things, international coffee prices fell. Subsequently, world interest rates rose, international bankers became more cautious about lending to developing countries, and Guatemala's insurgency began to diminish the number of tourists, which affected other areas of the economy. High interest rates abroad and uncertainties at home led to an outflow of domestic funds and reduced domestic private investment by Guatemalans. Real GDP growth dropped from an average of 6.9 percent a year in the 1976-78 period to 4.5 percent in 1979, 3.5 percent in 1980, and just under 1 percent in 1981. Official but preliminary estimates in early 1983 indicated that real growth declined by about 3.5 percent in 1982, and economists expected little or no growth in 1983.

In 1981 declining export earnings and very small international currency reserves had required harsh import and exchange controls to reduce pressure on the balance of payments. The decline in exports to CACM in 1981 had already depressed manufacturing output, and the sharp reduction of imports—including raw materials and equip-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

ment—imposed in late 1982 should further cut industrial activity in 1983. Although statistics were unavailable, unemployment and underemployment rose in 1982. An increasing number of businesses went bankrupt, and some factories closed. By early 1983 economic conditions were poor and deteriorating.

The effect was felt primarily in the modern sector. In 1981 the structure of the economy favored services, which contributed 53 percent of GDP. Trade was the largest sector, accounting for 27 percent. Commercial activity included a number of small-scale vendors and petty traders. Agriculture, including some forestry and fishing, contributed 25 percent of GDP, of which the largest part was produced on large commercial estates. Manufacturing contributed 16 percent; mining and utilities, another 2 percent. Construction accounted for nearly 4 percent of GDP. The modern sector produced the bulk of value added in the economy but employed a minority of the working force. The majority of the population engaged in traditional economic activities—subsistence farming, agricultural labor, handicrafts, and backcountry trading. An additional part of the population consisted of recent migrants to urban areas seeking full-time jobs, but who often existed on scant earnings from part-time work or as street vendors. For that part of the population outside the modern economy, life changed little from year to year or even from generation to generation. Subsistence living was much the same in 1983 as 1953. The economic growth since the 1950s had hardly reached most of the population, and for some, particularly Highlands subsistence farmers, their marginal living declined because of smaller plots with less soil fertility.

Economists expected that Guatemala's economic recovery would be slow. Much would depend on economic recovery from recessions in countries that usually bought Guatemala's exports, for both agriculture and industry relied heavily on sales abroad because of the small domestic market. It was not possible to measure how much the insurgency contributed to the deteriorating economic conditions, but a more peaceful and stable environment was essential for private investment and for the tourist flow to return to normal levels. Over a longer period, before the country could realize its potential, the traditional economy needed to modernize to increase productivity and alter the pattern of income distribution so that the domestic market could expand. Many observers linked the stagnation in the traditional economy to the insurgency, arguing that changes in the economic system and in the distribution of incomes were necessary to remove an important cause of social discontent. Many statistics supported their arguments that the "trickle down" theory resulted in little more than an occasional drop.

### **Role of Government**

Historically, government has left most economic and social development to the private sector. The legacy has been dual economies and societies. Not only was the economy split between modern and traditional, but the society also was divided between ladinos and Indians.

the latter usually unable to speak Spanish, mostly illiterate, and rarely with access to education, health facilities, and other social services (see *Regional and Ethnic Diversity*, ch. 2). Economic growth required a lessening of the dualism, for productive employment in industry or agriculture demanded at least basic literacy and numeric skills as well as good health. Lessening the dualism would require a more dynamic role for government and substantial economic and social investments compared with the past.

After World War II government activities expanded somewhat. Major investments went into enlarging the economic infrastructure. In the early 1950s the government constructed a port on the Caribbean coast (Santo Tomás de Castilla—10 kilometers from existing Puerto Barrios), a connecting highway to the capital paralleling the existing railroad, and a road system in the Pacific coastal region opening up the country's richest land to commercial farming (see fig. 4). In the 1960s and 1970s large investments were made in dams and transmission lines to begin development of the country's substantial hydroelectric potential. The government formed state-owned companies to develop electric power, buy and operate the railroad network, provide a national airline, maintain and expand national and international telecommunications, and provide other services, including financial institutions. Public enterprises were small in number and usually not a monopoly; government moved into business reluctantly (and much less than many developing countries) and usually as a last resort because operations and development exceeded the financing capabilities of, or offered inadequate profitability to, private investors. Investments in schools, health centers, potable water, and housing also increased somewhat.

In 1954 a national planning agency was created under the Office of the Presidency (see *Executive*, ch. 4). Its first plan covered the 1955-60 period. A number of plans followed (one extending to the mid-1980s) of growing sophistication, reflecting the increasing competency of the staff. The planners understood the economy's needs and prescribed programs for improvements, including draft legislation when legal changes were required. The planners, however, had little authority and no control over an economy almost completely in the private sector. Such incentives as tax holidays and exemptions from import duties for industrial raw materials and equipment, for example, were used to stimulate industrial development and sometimes to guide its direction. Subsidized credit promoted additional investment. But more important, the political authorities lacked the dedication of the planners to economic and social development.

A more active role for government meant larger expenditures, which in turn required larger revenues. In the 1970s national plans called for more government activity, including increased taxes and outlays. But the political leaders were unwilling or unable to push through the increase in taxes required for the government to do more. The wealthy opposed higher taxes and retained considerable power under the successive military administrations (see *The Private Sector*, ch. 4). In the



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

mid-1970s central government revenues represented less than 9 percent of GDP, compared with 13 percent in the rest of Central America and over 15 percent in other parts of Latin America. In 1981 total central government revenues were still under 9 percent of GDP. Guatemalan leaders have been very conservative financially over the years. The exchange rate, for example, has remained unchanged since 1926—one quetzal per United States dollar—a sustained stability recorded by few countries in the world. Guatemalan governments usually reduced expenditures with a fall in revenues, which were largely based on foreign trade, in order to avoid pressure on the balance of payments. As a result, Guatemala had a small public debt owed to foreign or domestic creditors.

Some tax changes were introduced, particularly in 1974, but they did not reform the structure. In 1979 the overwhelming bulk of central government revenues were derived from taxes, 43 percent of which were taxes on domestic commerce (see table 2, Appendix). A cascading stamp tax on each level of transactions was the most important. Taxes on foreign trade produced 38 percent of tax revenue in 1979, of which those on exports produced the greatest revenue. A tax on coffee exports was the single biggest source of revenue between 1977 and 1980, but revenues fell by 67 percent in 1981. The increased importance of export taxes reflected improvements in the tax structure as well as the limitations on import duties stemming from CACM provisions. Direct taxes were primarily derived from business income, which yielded 17 percent of total taxes in 1979. Personal income taxes and property taxes were minor sources of income. Economists considered agriculture and property or personal incomes substantially undertaxed. Industry contributed taxes above its share of GDP.

The past tendency of the government was to restrain or reduce expenditures when revenues slowed. Since 1977 some individual programs were reduced—defense and government administration were usually spared—to hold down outlays, but total central government expenditures rose substantially between 1977 and 1981, from 11 percent to 15 percent of GDP, partly because of capital investments. As a result of the 1976 earthquake, total government expenditures rose to 15 percent of GDP but fell back in 1977. From 1978 through 1981 capital investments increased faster than current expenditures and revenues, particularly after 1979. In part the government used expansionary fiscal measures to stimulate the economy while undertaking broad development, particularly of the infrastructure. Large, uneven spending was especially involved in two major hydroelectric projects (to end a shortage of electricity and reduce oil imports) that probably kept capital expenditures higher than desired in 1980 and 1981. The increasing budget deficits required sharp curtailment of government spending in 1982, including postponement of the start of another hydroelectric dam and cancellation of a major road project through the area just below the department of Petén. Budget data were not available to measure the reduction.

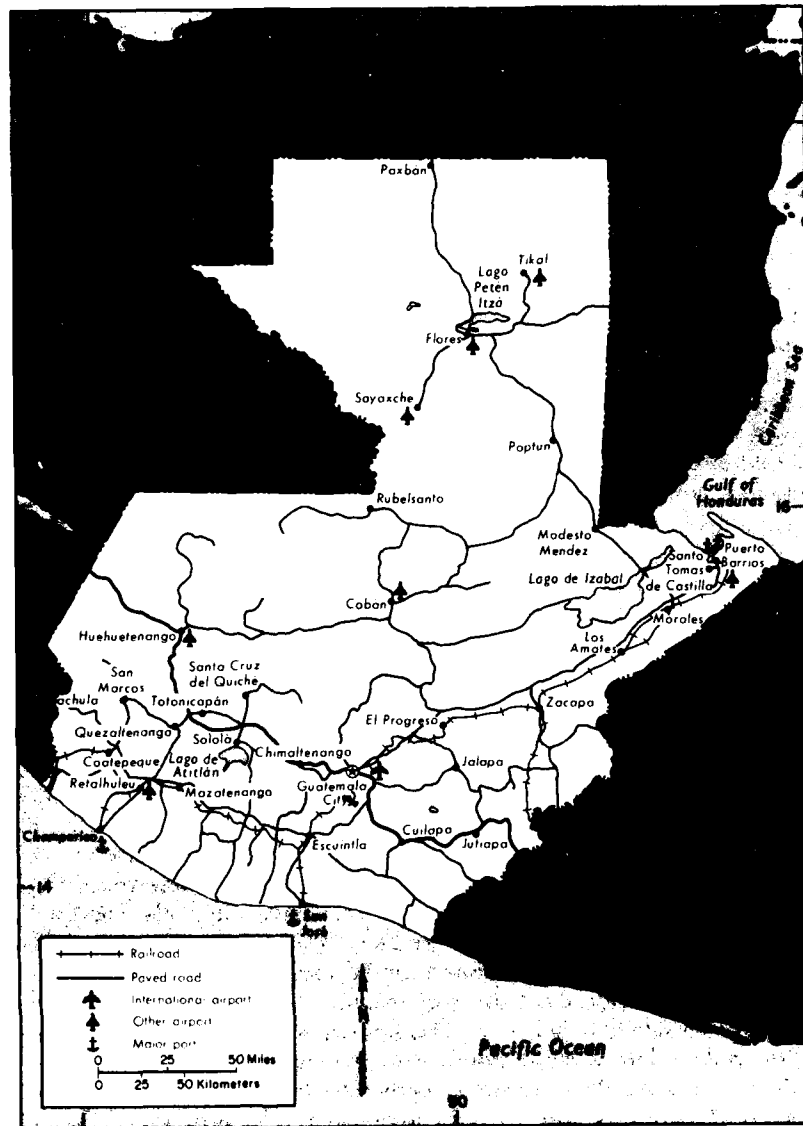


Figure 4. Transportation, 1982

After a coup in March 1982 Ríos Montt became president of a nation whose economy was in serious trouble. A condition of an International Monetary Fund (IMF) loan in late 1981 was smaller budget deficits. The president's fiscal policies and spending priorities were not clear because of the conditions attached to his first budgets. Official statements indicated a switching of focus away from large costly projects toward smaller public works and services of immediate concern to

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

Highland villagers. It remained to be seen whether this was a return to fiscal conservatism or whether his government intended to be active in lessening the dualism in the economy and the society.

In addition to the central government, the public sector included local government and a number of relatively autonomous enterprises and institutions. The departments had almost no source of funds other than government transfers (see Local Government, ch. 4). Municipal government had some taxing authority but also depended on central government funds. The various government agencies largely depended on central government transfers, but during the 1970s efforts were made to bring rates charged for services, such as electricity and transportation, closer to operating costs. In the late 1970s rioting followed some price increases, which were then rescinded, but there was movement toward lower subsidy costs, although usually not enough for the business to produce a profit for the government budget or to finance capital improvements. The central government was dominant, but the public sector was a larger entity that slightly increased revenues and expenditures relative to GDP.

The rise in central government expenditures since 1977 relative to revenues resulted in growing budget deficits that reached 7 percent of GDP in 1981 compared with about 2 percent or less earlier in the 1970s. In 1978 the budget deficit was US\$63 million, and in 1980 it reached US\$447 million. In 1981 the deficit climbed to nearly US\$640 million. It was expected to be about US\$450-US\$500 million in 1982. The bulk of the growing deficits were financed internally by the central bank. The public sector indebtedness, however, was small, amounting to about US\$2.1 billion at the end of 1981, and only a small part was owed foreign creditors (see Balance of Payments, this ch.). The rapid increase of the public debt was noteworthy, partly because it was uncharacteristic of previous governments. It was also noteworthy because it was not higher—the result of deficiencies in staffs, coordination, and project planning that reduced the investment absorptive capacity of the economy. Planned capital expenditures were substantially higher, and foreign loans were disbursed more slowly than scheduled and considerably below the amounts committed. The rapid increase of the public debt was also noteworthy, partly because it reflected the failure to reform the revenue structure to conform with benefits received. Economists, foreign and Guatemalan, have noted ways the tax structure could be made more fair while contributing resources to benefit all the population.

### **Labor Force**

From 1950 to 1980 Guatemala's labor force nearly doubled, reaching 2.1 million workers in 1980—an increase of 2.5 percent a year (see table 3, Appendix). This rate differs from several estimates of the rate of population growth. For this reason and others, labor force data should be viewed somewhat skeptically. Employment grew relatively faster in transportation, trade, and manufacturing among the major



*On the Inter-American Highway at El Citán,  
between Chimaltenango and Tecpan  
Courtesy David Mangurian, Inter-American Development Bank*

sources of employment, but agriculture furnished the greatest number of jobs, over one-half of those that became available over the three decades. In 1980 agriculture employed 58 percent of the labor force, manufacturing 14 percent, trade 7 percent, and a variety of services, including government, 12 percent.

Because the education system was limited, the bulk of the entrants into the labor force were unskilled, frequently illiterate, and included many who could not speak Spanish (see Education, ch. 2). Vocational training expanded during the 1970s, but the labor force remained chronically short of skilled and semiskilled workers. A large part of the work force received only the minimum wage, which was about the equivalent of US\$3.50 per day in 1982. In early 1983 Ríos Montt accused some owners of large estates of paying agricultural laborers only one-half the minimum daily wage. Workers in a number of industries had unions, but union activity has been greatly constrained by the government for most of the time since the 1950s (see Popular Organizations, ch. 4).

## Agriculture

Farming is both the strength and the weakness of the economy. Agriculture, including some forestry and fishing, was the main commodity-producing sector, contributing 25 percent of GDP (in 1958 prices) in 1981 and employing about 58 percent of the labor force. Farm produce supplied 61 percent of commodity exports as well as most of the materials processed by domestic industry. Farming was the backbone of the economy, but a huge gulf separated subsistence agriculture from most commercial farming, particularly that for export. In the 1970s commercial farming expanded at an appreciable rate, whereas subsistence agriculture failed to increase as fast as the population. Food imports grew, and small farmers became increasingly poverty-stricken, which contributed to social discontent.

### Land Use

The official estimate of the country's total area is 10,889,000 hectares. Data on the use of land were less than precise, however. In the early 1980s between one-third and two-thirds of the country was forested (see Forestry, this ch.). Less than one-third consisted of mountainous terrain, built-up areas, and lakes, streams, and wetlands. Agricultural censuses recorded agricultural land, i.e., held by farms but probably including some wooded and rocky areas, as 3.7 million hectares in 1950, 3.4 million hectares in 1964, and 4.2 million hectares in 1979. Observers have not attached much significance to the changes in the amount of agricultural land because of differences in what was included in different censuses and other imprecisions. Some of the increase in agricultural land in the 1979 agricultural census, however, presumably reflected additions to farmland as population pressure resulted in the cultivation of marginal areas and new frontierlands.

The 1964 agricultural census of agricultural land listed 1.5 million hectares (43 percent) as capable of cultivation, 1 million hectares (29 percent) as natural and permanent pastures, and 900,000 hectares (28 percent) as not subject to productive use. The census reflected judgments of what was cultivable. Owners with large landholdings could be selective, and they owned the bulk of the land judged not cultivable. An owner of a small farm in the Highlands tilled his plot for whatever it would yield even though it had been cropped for years, had lost much of its fertility, and was subject to considerable erosion. Small farms used land more intensively than large ones.

According to the 1964 agricultural census, of the nearly 1.5 million hectares that could be cultivated, over 700,000 hectares were in annual crops, over 300,000 hectares were in tree or other permanent crops, and over 400,000 hectares were left fallow. Between the mid-1960s and 1978 the area actually cultivated in annual and permanent crops, as reflected in statistics for the country's main crops excluding pastures, hovered close to 1.2 million hectares annually. This included crops that were grown on land unsuited for such use, particularly in the

western Highlands, while substantial amounts of good cropland were not used to their full potential.

In 1976 the population density for the country was just under 60 individuals per square kilometer, but the density was almost 143 persons per square kilometer of arable land. The pressure on the land was greatest in the western Highlands; in some of these departments, cultivation exceeded the cultivable land. Marginal land had been cleared and planted, adding to serious erosion problems. The period of fallowing was shortened and often eliminated. Loss of soil fertility reduced yields. Some subsistence farmers migrated, because of the lack of additional land, to start farms in the coastal or northern lowlands, but pressure on the cultivable soils of the western Highlands remained excessive in the early 1980s, and demographic projections indicated it would likely grow worse.

The differences in elevation in various parts of the country permitted cultivation of a very wide variety of crops (see fig. 3). Variations in soils and rainfall patterns partly determined where cultivation occurred. The Pacific coastal area had the best soils and was the most productive region, specializing in commercial farming, particularly in such export commodities as coffee, cotton, sugar, and livestock. Cotton, sugarcane, and cattle were the principal products at lower elevations. Coffee was the important crop at higher altitudes. Plantations and large estates were concentrated in the coastal region.

The Highlands extended across the central part of the country. The western and central Highlands contained the country's highest peaks, many above 3,000 meters. The population there was predominantly Indian, using traditional techniques to raise primarily corn and beans, mainly on subsistence farms. Wheat and potatoes were grown at upper elevations, and sheep grazed on a few upland natural pastures. Fruits, vegetables, and numerous other minor crops were cultivated in the lower valleys of the Highlands. The eastern Highlands were lower and were populated with more ladino farmers. A broad range of crops were cultivated, often as a commercial operation. The southeast area contained much of the country's irrigated land because of low rainfall, but irrigation was developed for only a tiny fraction of the arable land.

Petén, the northern department, is a lowland, heavily forested region of 3.6 million hectares, occupying about one-third of the country. It is thinly populated. The 1950 census recorded only 15,636 inhabitants, averaging 0.45 person per square kilometer. In the 1960s a government agency subordinate to the Ministry of National Defense was created to foster development, particularly as a release for the overcrowding of farmlands in the western Highlands. Large areas were set aside as forest reserves, national parks, and archaeological sites where farming was prohibited. Settlement schemes for farmers suffered from underfunding. Nonetheless, substantial numbers of poor farmers migrated to Petén, especially after the 1976 earthquake. The 1980 census reported a population of 131,000 persons, an average of nearly four individuals per square kilometer. The lack of roads and other infra-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

structure made most farming subsistence rather than commercial. Still, a number of the wealthy urban elite bought and claimed large tracts, often where roads and other facilities were to be built, for cattle or multipurpose ranches and for speculative purposes. Disputes over rights to land grew more numerous.

The other major frontier area with potential agricultural land is the Northern Transversal Strip (*Franja Transversal del Norte*), an area about 40 kilometers wide extending east and west below the department of Petén and north of the Highlands. Of the strip's 914,000 hectares, about 800,000 hectares had some agricultural potential, but only about 80,000 hectares appeared suitable for intensive cultivation of annual crops. During the 1970s major roads were started across and through the transversal strip, as well as development of oil fields and other mineral sites. Farming communities were started, some by spontaneous migration and some as planned settlements partly financed by United States aid. Haphazard land distribution by authorities led to violent conflicts over land claims, mostly between Indians and the new landholders (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). Critics charged that the government, through large grants to the wealthy and failure to limit farm size, was perpetuating one of the country's major problems—the unequal distribution of land.

In 1982 the government requested the United States Agency for International Development (AID) to conduct a study of the availability and problems of agricultural use of government-owned land. The study, completed within the year with the assistance of American consultants, confirmed what many Guatemalans had surmised, i.e., that cultivation had been pushed increasingly into marginal land in many departments and that government-owned land in the transversal strip and Petén offered the major relief for the overcrowding in the western Highlands.

The problem was that Petén and the strip had small amounts of good agricultural land. About 50 percent of the strip and 40 percent of Petén were covered by karst soils that covered porous limestone with considerable underground drainage. The soils tended to dry quickly, lose nutrients, and erode once the forest cover was removed. Estimated corn production in Petén, for example, dropped by two-thirds between 1976 and 1978. The depth of the soil varied considerably. Successful farming in Guatemalan karst soils had been primarily under dense cover where the soil was not exposed, such as coffee grown under shade trees. In effect, the karst soils in specific areas had to be studied for depth, drainage, and other characteristics to determine whether they could be used successfully for agricultural purposes and then for what crops and under what conditions of cultivation. The large area of karst soils on the north side of the Highlands offered no easy solution to overcrowding in the Highlands. Careful and expensive studies were needed before cultivation could begin if irreversible ecological damage was to be avoided. Such damage, to an undetermined extent, had already occurred in Petén and the strip from some earlier cultivation. Small amounts of additional agricultural land could be obtained from



*Woman weaving a lienzo (half of a huipil) in her home  
in Santa María de Jesús  
Courtesy David Mangurian, Inter-American Development Bank*

wetlands in various parts of the country, including Petén and the strip, although requiring costly investments for drainage and water control.

The AID study concluded that only a fraction of the landless could be resettled on the available government-owned land. The experts made their calculations in terms of the amount of land required to support an average family, i.e., adjustments were attempted for the quality of different soils. Guatemalan agricultural statistics used the inter-American standard unit of seven hectares as the amount of land required to support the average family. In fact, agricultural economists familiar with Guatemalan farming recognized that about 3.5 hectares of high-quality land was the most an average family could cultivate and that that amount would provide sufficient income. In contrast, seven hectares of karst land would be less than that needed for adequate support of a family. The study found that little more than 100,000 hectares of government-owned land (expressed in equivalents of first-class soils) were available for distribution to the landless agricultural workers unless areas with karst soils were included. When karst forest soils (located almost exclusively on the north side of the Highlands) were included, about 473,000 hectares of the equivalent of first-class



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

soils could be distributed, which would accommodate about 55 percent of the landless farm laborers (309,000) lacking full-time agricultural employment, or 41 percent of the nearly 420,000 landless farm workers.

The AID study recommended continuation of AID financing of the Guatemalan government's colonization in the transversal strip even though implementation had been slowed by inadequate action by both the United States and the Guatemalan governments. The study acknowledged, however, that because construction of new agricultural communities and farms was both slow and costly, colonization in the strip and Petén would have small effect in the short term. The study suggested two additional possibilities that could provide faster relief to overcrowding in the Highlands because they involved farmland already under cultivation.

The researchers' preliminary investigation indicated that some relatively simple and inexpensive changes could stimulate the purchase and sale of farm properties, a market that had hardly developed by the early 1980s. A number of reasons, including declining security in the countryside, made landowners, even of large tracts, disposed toward the sale of part or all of their properties. Land-poor and landless farmers were eager to buy land if credit and technical aids were available. Subsidized credit and additional extension services would be less costly than developing new farmlands in frontier areas. Moreover, by 1982 more than 50,000 Highland small farmers had shifted from subsistence crops to high-valued commercial produce, reflecting adoption of modern techniques by the farmers as well as the availability of inputs and technology.

The second possibility the study noted was that existing laws (since the 1930s) levied a progressive tax on some unused cultivable farmland, although the procedures were largely unworkable and had had little effect (see *Landownership and Agrarian Reform*, this ch.). The amount of idle farmland in 1982 was estimated between 200,000 and 260,000 hectares of the equivalent of first-class soils, a substantial potential addition to government-owned land. Making the laws pertaining to idle farmland workable and increasing enforcement would pressure the private owners to cultivate the land or give it up for distribution to farmers who would. Expropriation or land reform would not be involved, only adjusting existing laws to achieve their stated intent. Such a change should increase the productive use of the country's resources, it could also contribute to the development of a market for farmland.

#### **Landownership and Agrarian Reform**

Landownership in Guatemala is distributed very unequally, adversely affecting incomes of the bulk of the rural population. Probably no country in Latin America has fewer people owning as much of the country's farmland. In 1979 nearly 90 percent of the farms—those of fewer than seven hectares, had only 16 percent of the farmland (see table 4, Appendix). At the other extreme, only about 3 percent of the farms, those over 45 hectares, had 65 percent of the agricultural land and most frequently that with the best soils.

The striking maldistribution of farmlands arose largely from historical factors. The Spanish conquerors brought with them a belief in the private ownership of property, which they began to impose on the Indians, who had held at least part of their farmland communally. The conquerors, supported by decrees of the Spanish court, appropriated large areas of land, including the rights to the labor of Indians in the area (see *Conquest and Early Settlement*, ch. 1). Under this feudal-like system, Indians continued to cultivate their land—except that which the Spanish used—contributing primarily labor for transportation, mining, and cultivation on Spanish fields. Since Guatemala had little mineral wealth, the landholders turned to plantation agriculture, focusing on crops for dyes to supply Europe's growing textile industries. The Spanish also concentrated the Indians into villages and towns as much as possible to facilitate labor drafts and Christian conversion. In keeping with practices in Spain, villages held some land for various communal purposes.

Royal decrees during the colonial period attempted, though with little success, to protect the Indians from land-hungry colonists and ladinos. After independence in 1821, laws favored private ownership of farmland in an effort to foster agricultural development. Introduction of coffee cultivation in the early 1840s proved highly successful, stimulating land acquisition and colonists from Europe. Laws in the late 1800s attempted to encourage agricultural development and to create a class of prosperous independent farmers by the sale of public land, partly stripped from Roman Catholic Church holdings, in 45- to 225-hectare parcels. The unfortunate result was greater land concentration rather than the emergence of "yeoman" farmers. The addition of bananas, sugar, and cotton as profitable exports further accelerated the concentration of landholdings and the extension of plantation-like operations.

An important ingredient in the unequal distribution of landownership was the strength of the Indian culture (see *Indigenous Belief Systems*, ch. 2). It resisted integration, retaining an "Indianness" of which all Guatemalans were aware. The willingness or proclivity to inhabit isolated and undesirable land facilitated retention of a separate identity among the Indian groups. Generally lacking understanding of legal matters or faith in legal documents, Indians failed to register titles to land even if their families had cultivated the land for centuries. In the early 1980s many Indians still had no legal title to the land they farmed, although such registration had been encouraged at various times since the conquest. Outsiders used force or the legal system to push Indians off their land. Sometimes the Indians fought back, but they more often retreated to higher elevations to begin farming new land. In the twentieth century the concentration of population in the Highlands plus a high birth rate exceeded the ability of the mountainous terrain to support them. Farm size dropped, fertility of the land lessened because organic materials and fallowing diminished, and off-farm income became more necessary to support a family. Economics

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

forced changes in Indian ways of life. By the early 1950s the manifestations were many—armed insurgency, commercial farming, trade and transportation businesses, education, and migration among them. Nonetheless, the Indian usually retained a quality of Indian culture and tribal and linguistic cohesion.

Another factor contributing to the unequal distribution of land was the economic system. Soon after the Spanish conquest, Guatemala's rulers turned to export crops to pay for imports. Cheap labor was needed, which Indians were forced to supply. Over the years the export crops changed but not the system. In the early 1950s the country's ability to import—and the demand for imports had considerably broadened since colonial times—still largely depended on relatively few owners of large farms or plantations using cheap labor to produce basic commodities for export. A system emerged in which large estates kept *colonos* (residential workers), who were granted the use of subsistence crops. The *colonos* were supplemented by migratory laborers, mostly Indians from the Highlands, at harvest time, which came at a slack period for Highland farmers (see Rural-Urban Variation, ch. 2). Increasingly in this century the cash income from plantation harvest work has provided the margin to get by for growing numbers of Highland families even though the conditions, pay, and hardships made the plantation work *unattractive*. The system continued because of the power and profits of landowners, the requirement for export revenues and foreign exchange by the government, and the need for extra cash income by a growing part of the rural population. Nevertheless, in the early 1950s the possibilities of mechanization on *commercial farms*, the insurgency, and other factors threatened the existing economic structure.

One aspect of export-oriented agriculture needs mention because of its importance in stimulating agrarian reform in the 1950s. Starting in the 1880s with a speculative purchase of a few bananas in Jamaica by a fishing boat captain on his way home to New England, several companies became involved in the production and marketing of bananas, and those companies merged into the United Fruit Company in 1899. The company made large investments, created numerous jobs, added many facilities—such as ports, railroads, schools, and hospitals—and provided substantial tax revenues and foreign exchange for Central American nations. According to critics, however, the company accomplished these feats by many ruthless, unsavory, and illegal acts. The company remained a powerful economic and political force until the 1960s, often being the largest private employer and a major earner of foreign exchange in most Central American countries.

The United Fruit Company began operations in Guatemala in 1901, initially by providing mail service through its fleet of banana boats. It acquired large tracts in the hot lowlands near the Caribbean that were not being used. Successful banana plantations were carved out of the jungle, and homes and amenities were constructed for the large labor force. Banana cultivation can sometimes remain in one area for 10

years, frequently much less. The company also acquired a large area on the fertile Pacific lowlands in 1930. The company's landholdings eventually reached over 188,000 hectares, making it Guatemala's largest private landowner in the 1950s. Cultivation usually took up only a tiny fraction of its area, but the company claimed it needed reserves of land for shifting areas of cultivation when fertility declined and for other reasons. The company also built part of the railroad system at the request of the Guatemalan government and remained indirectly linked into the 1950s with the foreign-owned company that operated the Guatemalan railroad network. Critics charged that the United Fruit Company received favorable freight rates at the expense of the rest of the users in the economy. By the 1940s the company was the focus of popular resentment and a symbol of United States domination. The nationalization of part of the company's holdings provoked a strong negative reaction by the government in Washington and helped create the atmosphere in which the United States government decided to overthrow the Guatemalan government (see Foreign Interests, ch. 1). Company operations slowed in the 1960s, and its Guatemalan properties were sold to Del Monte in 1972.

The plight of the Highland farmer did not go unnoticed. Over the centuries various measures were tried to bring the Indians into the mainstream of the country's economic life, although some efforts suffered from less than enthusiastic implementation by the government. *The Indians also often resisted change, using isolation and other tactics to avoid alteration of the status quo.* In the 1930s some laws attempted to distribute land to the land-poor, but the actual impact was not noticeable. A tax on idle land was established to stimulate cultivation, but without notable success. The so-called vagrancy law of 1934, which required small landholders to carry passports to show that they had worked the required 100 to 150 days (depending on the amount of land owned), was implemented to ensure availability of Indian labor. This law was abolished in 1945.

During the liberal decade of 1944 to 1954, a major but moderate agrarian reform was attempted. The constitution of 1945 charged the state with development of agricultural activities. Private property was recognized and guaranteed only when it fulfilled its social function. Expropriation was sanctioned when in the public interest. The new constitution abolished indentured servitude on plantations. A 1945 law simplified titling of agricultural land that a farmer had worked for at least 10 years, but it was used more by the wealthy than by the small farmer, the intended beneficiary. The 1947 Labor Code permitted organization and unionization of agricultural workers, but only on large plantations employing 300 or more. These and some additional laws had little noticeable effect on the agrarian structure.

This changed with the Law of Agrarian Reform of 1952. Its stated objectives were the elimination of feudal estates, abolition of indentured servitude, distribution of land to the landless and the land-poor, and provision of credit and technical services to small farmers. In

contrast to its declared intent, the actual measure was much more modest. Idle land and that which owners had rented or sharecropped was to be expropriated, but there were many exemptions. Farms under 90 hectares were exempted even if idle. Farms between 90 and 270 hectares were not subject to expropriation if at least two-thirds were cultivated. Farms growing cash crops (for domestic or export use) were exempt even if the land was rented to other farmers. The qualifications made the reform law moderate, particularly in the face of the inequality of landownership. Expropriated land was to be paid for through 25-year bonds at 3 percent interest annually; the value of the land was fixed as that declared for tax purposes in May 1952.

Land was to be distributed to small farmers, plantation workers, and landless agricultural workers. Urban workers entitled to payments under the Labor Code could receive land instead. In Petén a beneficiary could receive lifetime use of up to 1,350 hectares. In the rest of the country a beneficiary could receive between 3.5 and seven hectares of cultivated land, between 10.5 and 17.5 hectares of uncultivated land, and an increase of up to a maximum of 17.5 hectares for small farmers already owning less than seven hectares. Recipients of expropriated land were to pay the government 5 percent of the value of the annual harvest.

Beneficiaries of state land, primarily national farms that were coffee plantations confiscated from German owners during World War II, received lifetime use with an annual rental payment of 3 percent of the value of each year's crop. Additional provisions covered rentals and payments under varying conditions. Various organizations were created for transfers, credit, extension services, and other supporting activity.

Once mechanisms were established, expropriation under the Law of Agrarian Reform moved rapidly, beginning in early January 1953 and continuing until mid-June 1954. Nearly 604,000 hectares of privately held land were affected by expropriation notices; with 280,000 additional hectares of state land available, the total came to almost 884,000 hectares for distribution—about 16 percent of total agricultural land. The number of beneficiaries was uncertain, estimates ranging from 78,000 to 100,000 families—perhaps 30 to 40 percent of the landless. Over half of the land expropriated was in the departments of Alta Verapaz, Izabal, and Escuintla. Toward the end of the period, the situation became chaotic; owners did not know what they had lost, and recipients did not know what they had gained. Moreover, records were destroyed after the 1954 coup. Available records indicated that about 370,000 hectares were distributed, 75 percent in the form of lifetime rental. Much of the land distributed was that expropriated from the United Fruit Company and coffee plantations taken from Germans in World War II and held in national farms. Undoubtedly, farmers took over directly additional amounts of land from private landowners.

The land reform was a moderate, progressive program aimed at bringing idle land into cultivation; it did not attempt to break up large

estates. The program had serious flaws, however. Perhaps the most serious was the acceleration of expropriation claims and the radicalization of political positions toward the end, but land reform under the conditions in Guatemala was bound to be difficult to control once started. Use of 1952 tax declarations to establish land values was a gross undervaluation because all landowners, large and small, undervalued their land for taxes, which was officially viewed as a spur to agricultural development in many Latin American countries. The situation was compounded in Guatemala because adjustment of assessed values had not been made since 1931. The program as it developed was also criticized because it largely substituted the government as absentee landlord, replacing private plantation owners as the source of land for small renters and sharecroppers. Land distribution created few owner-operated farms.

Land reform came to a sudden halt after the June 1954 coup. Most land expropriations were annulled during the remainder of the year. The land reform law was rescinded at year's end, and procedures were established for former owners to regain title to their lands. The United Fruit Company over the next five years turned over to the government substantial blocks of mostly uncultivated land on both the Pacific and the Atlantic lowlands totaling over 50,000 hectares for distribution under national settlement programs. The government regained control of the national farms.

In 1956 a tax was decreed on private idle land, continuing the practice in existence since the 1930s. The tax rate rose steeply each year the land remained idle, and the land could be expropriated after five years. The semiautonomous National Institute of Agrarian Transformation (Instituto Nacional de Transformación Agraria—INTA), under the Ministry of Agriculture, was created to monitor the tax program (collection was under the Ministry of Finance) and to distribute land largely under colonization schemes. INTA was also to provide the roads, schools, water systems, and other support for farm settlements. The 1956 law was restated in 1962 and slightly modified in 1980 but remained essentially intact in 1982 as the main law affecting land distribution. The landowner, however, had to declare his land idle—INTA could not initiate the process. Cumbersome steps over a five-year period were then required before expropriation could take place. Idle land on farms of 100 hectares or less was exempt from expropriation. Farms over 100 hectares could have 100 hectares or 10 percent of their land idle, whichever was larger. Forest and mineral areas could be excluded from the idle land classification under certain conditions. The law was essentially unworkable and by 1982 had resulted in tax collections of probably less than US\$1 million and no known expropriations. Far more money was collected from recipients of land than through the tax on idle land, even though idle private agricultural land exceeded 1 million hectares.

Between 1955 and 1981 about 664,500 hectares were distributed from the state lands to 50,267 families, an average of about 24,600

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

hectares a year, although the pace of distribution varied considerably under different presidents. About one-half of the land distributed was in parcels above 25 hectares, more than that usually required to support a family. The bulk of the larger parcels exceeded 100 hectares, contrary to the focus of the land laws on family-sized plots. In fact, 39,122,000 hectares of the 74 national farms were distributed to the elite between 1955 and 1962 in holdings averaging 3,125 hectares of prime farmland already planted in permanent cash crops, such as coffee and sugarcane. Government policy effectively perpetuated the unequal distribution of agricultural land and the gulf between subsistence and commercial farmers.

A little more than 40 percent of the land distributed between 1955 and 1981 was in plots between seven and 25 hectares. Only a tiny fraction consisted of plots under seven hectares, the measure used by the government as the farm size needed to support an average family. About two-thirds of the land distributed was in frontier areas, particularly Alta Verapaz, Quiché, and Izabal, and mostly where beneficiaries were organized in cooperatives or part of a colonization program. Between 1971 and 1981 about 330,000 hectares were distributed under colonization programs essentially located in frontier areas. Opening up new land was expensive because of the infrastructure that had to be built. United States financial and technical aid supported the government's decision to concentrate on a colonization policy.

Strong economic considerations constrained government policy toward more equitable distribution of agricultural land. The landed elite wielded substantial economic and political power and opposed changes. Government revenues and the country's foreign exchange earnings significantly depended on export crops grown primarily on the commercial estates of the wealthy. Guatemala's high rate of population growth caused a sharp fall in the amount of arable land per capita—from 1.7 hectares in 1950 to 0.8 hectare in 1980. By the late 1970s, if all of the agricultural land had been distributed equally among rural families, each would have received about 3.3 hectares; every year the amount became smaller.

As of mid-1983 the Ríos Montt government had indicated no intention of initiating a major land reform. Officials were considering changes in procedures for taxing idle land to bring more under cultivation, however, as well as various measures to facilitate purchase and sale of private farmland. The proposals would help the plight of some small farmers and part of the landless and land-poor, but the productivity of small farms needed to be increased, and additional jobs for off-farm employment were necessary to absorb the excess rural population.

### **Cropping Patterns and Production**

In the early 1980s farming practices in Guatemala remained generally antiquated, and productivity levels were low—cotton being a major exception. In the Highlands and on subsistence farms in other areas, a planting stick, hoe, and machete were the main tools. Local seed varieties were generally used with only limited applications of organic



*Farmer placing shocks of wheat to dry*  
*Courtesy David Mangurian, Inter-American Development Bank*

wastes and virtually no use of chemical fertilizers. Even cash crops on large estates seldom used much machinery or modern practices. Agronomists noted a substantial potential for higher yields on most fields if available technology were applied.

During the 1970s the government expanded assistance to farmers and improved somewhat the coordination between the various autonomous agricultural agencies. Extension services were available but severely understaffed for the task of reaching the many small farmers. Agricultural credit was increased, particularly after the mid-1970s, but helped only about one-third of the farmers, primarily those growing commercial crops, especially those for export. The lack of access to credit at an affordable cost was a major barrier to increased productivity for most small farmers. Although extension of roads, transportation, and storage improved small farmers' access to markets, many remained isolated. At least 50,000 Highlands small farmers had switched from subsistence agriculture to high-valued cash crops, however, reflecting a willingness to adopt modern techniques when necessary ingredients were available, but this was a small fraction of the subsistence farmers—basically those favored by proximity to markets. The government needed to expand its activities and to include the poverty-stricken small farmer.



if farm productivity were to increase considerably.

In 1952 the Ríos Montt government focused attention on the small farmer. With the help of United States aid, crop diversification was pushed, particularly for the Highland Indian farmers. Rural investment, such as feeder roads, foot bridges, and other small public projects, was stepped up through a food-for-work program (see *Threats to Internal Security*, ch. 5). At the same time, insurgency and counter-insurgency operations increased, resulting in destruction of villages and losses of crops and animals. As a result of these activities, a large but uncertain number of people were displaced, which had an adverse but unmeasurable (until 1982 statistics become available) impact on farm production, including the movement of seasonal harvest workers to the coastal plantations.

#### **Basic Grains**

Corn was the main crop of subsistence farmers and, along with beans, the primary food of the rural poor. Corn furnished about one-half the calories and two-thirds of the protein in the average daily diet. In the late 1970s corn accounted for about 41 percent (500,000 hectares) of the total cropped area. During the 1970s the acreage planted in corn declined by 28 percent, largely because fertile land on the southwestern coast was switched to export crops, especially cotton and sugarcane (see table 5, Appendix). Corn production amounted to 572,000 tons in 1978 (see table 6, Appendix). Two crops a year were grown in some of the hot humid lowlands. Yields fluctuated but exhibited no trend in the 1970s. Yields amounted to about one to 1.5 tons per hectare compared with over five tons per hectare on research plots using high-yield seed varieties. Corn prices fluctuated during the year, falling at harvest time and rising most of the rest of the year. A government agency attempted to stabilize prices through the year but was limited by storage capacity and funding. Many poor farmers had to sell corn at low harvest prices, only to buy at higher prices later.

Wheat was consumed mostly in urban areas. It was grown at higher elevations, largely by small, specialized farms. Wheat acreage was nearly 26,000 hectares, and production was 32,900 tons in 1978. About two-thirds of the wheat for consumption was imported, primarily from the United States. Rice and sorghum were the other important grain crops. Beans, although not a grain, furnished the other main staple food and were usually grown intermixed with corn in the small farmer's plots. In the late 1970s acreage and production of beans dropped sharply, partly because of low support prices. It was not clear, however, how accurate statistics on beans were because the agricultural censuses of 1950 and 1964 showed substantial underreporting.

By the mid-1970s lagging basic food production was pinpointed as a problem because of the increasing burden imports placed on the balance of payments. Producer prices were increased. Farmers with more than 70 hectares were required to plant 10 percent of their land in basic grains. Credit was expanded for grain production. In the early 1980s recent grain production statistics were not available, but imports

were growing. In 1981 Guatemala imported 100,000 tons of wheat, 74,000 tons of corn, 10,000 tons of sorghum, and 4,000 tons of black beans. In 1982 imports probably rose again.

***Export and Commercial Crops***

Although occupying much less area than basic foods, the value of export crops was much higher—more than double that of basic foods in 1977. Better soils accounted for part of the difference, and the higher income was confined to a small number of landholders. Prices for export crops were set in international markets, however, and conditions in Guatemala had almost no effect. Prices for the country's main export crops peaked in the mid-1970s and were lower by the late 1970s and early 1980s. Because the country's ability to import depended to a large degree on world prices for its agricultural products, the economy's prosperity to a significant degree lay outside its borders.

Coffee was the most important export crop and foreign exchange earner (see Foreign Trade, this ch.). In the 1970s the area planted remained nearly constant, showing a slow increase in production, reaching 145,200 tons in 1978. Over 37,000 plantations produced coffee, but over 90 percent were very small and produced only a little over 10 percent of total coffee production. A minute number of very large plantations produced over half of the country's coffee. Productivity in Guatemala was little more than one-half that in El Salvador and little better than one-third that in Costa Rica in the mid-1970s when the National Coffee Association (Asociación Nacional de Café—ANACAFE) undertook a program to raise yields through better use of fertilizers and other improved techniques. By the late 1970s the large plantations had raised productivity by more than 50 percent, but smaller coffee growers had been little affected by the program. By 1982 a potential existed for raising yields, but greater world consumption at higher prices for coffee appeared the best hope for the country's largest export. Meanwhile, the coffee trees were threatened by uneven rainfall patterns, borers, and such other problems as a highly contagious fungus, coffee rust. Guatemala was a member of international and regional coffee associations intent on preserving price stability and the members' foreign exchange earnings.

Cotton was the second most important agricultural crop destined for export, although domestic industry was processing increasing amounts before export. It was grown largely on the Pacific coastal plains on large plantations. Acreage increased until the late 1970s. Cotton was an exception in Guatemalan agriculture; the country was among world leaders in yields per hectare although at a price in terms of environmental damage. Cotton production depended on increasing use of fertilizers and pesticides, the latter roughly doubling in the mid-1970s. Studies found pesticide contamination of meat, dairy products, and other foods from the heavy spraying. In the mid-1970s the government restricted the use of certain pesticides and limited the area of spraying. In 1982 the foreign exchange shortage restricted the import of pesticides, and only 49,000 hectares were planted compared with 77,000

### *Guatemala. A Country Study*

hectares in 1981 and 127,000 hectares in 1978. The spread of the white fly, among other problems, accompanied the limited pesticides use.

After World War II Guatemala became an exporter instead of an importer of sugar. Sugarcane area and exports expanded. The rise in world sugar prices pushed sugar export earnings to US\$116 million (second largest ever) in 1975, and exports averaged 300,000 tons in 1976 and 1977. But world sugar prices declined, and earnings fell to US\$44 million in 1978. In 1978 nearly one-fifth of the crop was not harvested, and much of it was burned because of the low world prices. A number of planters subsequently switched to other crops, but statistics were unavailable on sugarcane acreage and production in the late 1970s and early 1980s. Sugar exports were valued at US\$85 million in 1981 and US\$46 million in 1982. Guatemala is a participant in the International Sugar Agreement. Exports were primarily to the United States under its quota system.

Commercial banana production was launched early in this century by the United Fruit Company. By 1947 exports reached 338,000 tons and were among the country's leading exports. But disease, wind damage, and other hazards make banana cultivation a risky business. Acreage and production generally declined in the 1950s and 1960s. In the 1970s acreage remained stable, close to 5,000 hectares a year, but annual production varied between about 250,000 and 350,000 tons a year, mostly for export. The value of banana exports was US\$51 million in 1981 and US\$74 million in 1982. Private farmers as well as Del Monte's subsidiary, the Banana Development Corporation of Guatemala (Bandequa), produced bananas for export. Guatemala participated in the Union of Banana Exporting Countries (UPEB), which attempted to maintain orderly marketing and price stability.

A number of additional commercial crops were grown partly for export. Cardamom was one of the important minor crops; exports amounted to about US\$26 million in 1982, shipped largely to the Middle East. Rubber, cocoa, essential oils, and flowers were produced largely for export. Tobacco and a variety of fruits and vegetables were grown mostly for domestic consumption. Many farmers raised a few vegetables for their own use, but small commercial farms specialized in vegetables for nearby urban centers.

#### **Livestock**

Raising of livestock was a major part of agriculture, contributing 30 percent of the gross value of agricultural production in 1981. Cattle were the most important, producing milk, meat, and hides. In 1978 there were approximately 1.5 million head of cattle. Ranches, which tended to be large, were distributed in most departments but more concentrated in the Pacific coastal area, particularly Escuintla. Local cattle predominated, but some breeding stock was imported, and upgrading of herds occurred during the 1970s. Most cattle were range fed. The rainfall pattern in the coastal region restricted pastures, and droughts were an ever-present threat. Since the mid-1970s some grasslands were planted in such cash crops as sugar and cotton, causing a

shift of cattle ranching to other regions. Some irrigation and supplemental feed helped maintain a slow growth of herds. The government controlled to a degree prices on cheaper cuts of beef, but better cuts were at world prices and affordable to only a small part of the population. Nonetheless, in 1979 the government temporarily halted beef exports because of insufficient supplies for the domestic market. In 1981 meat exports, primarily beef, were US\$29 million, shipped mainly to the United States. Experts indicated the cattle industry had potential for development for both foreign and domestic markets.

Pigs were raised on many medium-sized farms as part of overall operations, except for some commercial hog farms near the capital. In 1978 there were about 704,000 pigs. Meat was infrequent in the diet of most Guatemalans, so pigs were slaughtered only for special occasions or sold for consumption in urban areas. Poultry, primarily chickens, were raised by farmers and as a growing commercial operation. Consumption of chicken meat expanded rapidly during the 1970s. Sheep, raised mostly for wool, numbered about 600,000 in 1978. They fed primarily on natural pastures in the western Highlands. The number of goats was small. Mules and donkeys were used largely for transportation in isolated areas, but their number diminished as roads and trucks penetrated the interior. Horses were used on ranches and plantations, and some Indians in the western Highlands had a number of horses.

### **Forestry**

The country has extensive and valuable forest resources, but the extent of the forested area was uncertain. In the late 1970s the Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO) of the United Nations (UN) placed the forested area at 6.4 million hectares (59 percent of total area), while a Guatemalan conservation group placed remaining forest at 3.6 million hectares (33 percent of total area), and an FAO consultant estimated that 36 percent of the country was forested. Regardless of the exact figures, Guatemala had a large amount of forestland, but uncontrolled cutting was rapidly diminishing the forests and creating severe erosion problems. Estimates of the reduction of forests varied between about 30 and 50 percent in the 1950-80 period. According to these estimates far more land was cleared of trees, presumably mostly for farming, than became available for cultivation from other sources.

The largest forest reserves were in Petén and the transversal strip, but limited access restricted commercial exploitation. Many valuable species of trees grew in this area. Logging increased in Petén in the 1970s. Other northern forest products included chicle (the base for chewing gum), vanilla, sarsaparilla, camphor, cinnamon, and medicinal barks and herbs. Substantial timber cutting also occurred in coniferous forests in the Highlands. Experts estimated that 90 percent of all wood cut in Guatemala was for firewood used in cooking, coffee roasters, and kilns. In 1974 about 430,000 cubic meters of commercial logs were cut, partly to produce about 23,000 cubic meters of plywood and 28,000 tons of paper products. In 1978 an estimated 466,000 cubic meters of

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

logs were cut compared with 190,000 cubic meters in 1979. In 1981 forestry contributed less than 5 percent of the gross production of agriculture.

### **Fishing**

Commercial fishing was primarily confined to coastal waters, largely on the Pacific side. Inland fishing was mostly on a subsistence level. Coastal waters were fished for shrimp, tuna, snapper, and mackerel, mainly for export. In 1971 fish exports were about 1,500 tons with a value of US\$1.5 million. During the 1970s the shrimp catch declined because of migratory patterns. In 1980 the fish and shrimp catch amounted to 6,600 tons. In 1981 fishing contributed less than 1 percent of the gross value of production of the agricultural sector, but experts thought a potential for development existed that could provide additional protein for the population.

### **Industry**

Industry, including mining, manufacturing, and utilities, contributed 15 percent of GDP in 1981 and was the largest industrial sector in the Central American states. Nonetheless, Guatemala's industrial development remained at an early stage and faced difficult problems. The adequacy of government policies in the 1980s and private investors' responses will largely determine whether industrialization can provide the growth stimulus to the economy that economists believe possible.

### **Energy**

In the late 1970s per capita commercial energy consumption in Guatemala was significantly below the average for Central America and less than one-half of that in Panama because such a large portion of the population was not part of the modern economy. Wood and bagasse (woody residue of sugarcane stalks) still provided a substantial source of energy in rural areas. Electricity was largely confined to the few major urban centers. Nonetheless, energy consumption expanded rapidly during the 1970s. Fortunately, the country had energy sources on which to draw.

Oil exploration began in the 1950s, primarily in the northern part of the country, but largely ceased in the 1960s because of the difficult terms imposed on foreign oil companies by Guatemala's petroleum law. This law was changed in 1974, partly to meet some of the objections of foreign oil companies, although by international standards the 1974 law remained reasonably favorable to the government. By the late 1970s exploration contracts included production sharing, the government receiving a minimum of 55 percent of any oil discovered and the share increasing with high production levels. In the early 1980s several foreign oil firms were engaged in exploration.

Oil was discovered at Rubelsanto, Alta Verapaz, in 1972. The field was declared commercial in 1976. Other foreign oil companies merged with the founder to develop the field and explore other parts of the concession area. By March 1982 five production wells existed with



*Street scene, Chichicastenango  
Courtesy Museum of Modern Latin American Art*



*Weaver using backstrap loom, San Antonio Aguas Calientes  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph*

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

crude oil reserves estimated at 15 million barrels. Additional discoveries were anticipated because of the similarities of geological structures to those across the border in Mexico where substantial oil had been found. Guatemala's crude oil, so far, was heavy with a high sulfur and paraffin content. A 237-kilometer pipeline from Rubelsanto to the Caribbean port of Santo Tomás de Castilla was completed by private investors in 1980 and had a capacity of 60,000 barrels per day (bpd). This capacity far exceeded the country's production possibilities in the early 1980s but reflected hopes for future discoveries.

Crude oil production remained low until completion of the pipeline. In 1979 production was only 571,400 barrels, which was used as fuel and trucked to nearby industrial installations. Crude oil production was 1.5 million barrels in 1980 and 1981. Production data from the first quarter indicated that 1982 production probably would exceed 2 million barrels. Production of natural gas, associated with crude oil production, amounted to 14.6 million cubic meters in 1981, which was flared.

Guatemala's refining facilities consisted of a small Texaco refinery of 14,000 bpd at Escuintla. A second refinery, owned by Chevron and Shell oil companies and located at Puerto Barrios, had a capacity of 12,000 bpd. This refinery was mothballed in 1975, and it was unknown if it sustained damage in the 1976 earthquake. Apparently its use was not contemplated because the oil pipeline was not connected to it. The refinery at Escuintla was capable of handling the present domestic crude only when mixed with large amounts of light imported crude oil. The routing of the pipeline to a sea terminal indicated that at least for the next few years domestic crude would be largely exported to foreign refineries equipped to handle it, while imported light crude and refined products would continue to supply the domestic market. In 1981 some 661,700 barrels of domestic crude were exported, and 761,000 barrels of the heavy domestic crude were burned as fuel in thermal electric plants and a cement mill.

Guatemalan officials would like self-sufficiency in oil, but it appeared unlikely in the 1980s. The cost of the country's imported fuel jumped from US\$33 million in 1973 to nearly US\$150 million in 1978. In 1981 imported fuel and lubricants amounted to US\$378 million, 22 percent of total imports, despite a 10 percent reduction in the volume imported. The value of crude oil exports was US\$22 million in 1981 and US\$47 million in 1982. In 1981 imports of crude oil were 5.3 million barrels, and imported refined products were 4.1 million barrels. In 1981 domestic consumption of petroleum products, including domestic crude used as fuel, amounted to 10.2 million barrels compared with a peak of 11.6 million barrels in 1979. A much higher level of crude oil production would be needed to begin to satisfy the country's needs.

Hydroelectricity, another major energy source, could help reduce the country's dependence on imported oil. Guatemala's exploitable hydroelectric potential was estimated at 4,300 megawatts at 121 sites. In 1978 installed hydroelectric capacity was 96 megawatts, less than 3

percent of the potential. Two major hydro power plants, however (Aguacapa near Escuintla with 90 megawatts of capacity and Chixoy in Alta Verapaz with 300 megawatts of capacity), were scheduled to begin production in the early 1980s, which would greatly reduce the need to use fossil fuel to operate many of the thermal power plants. In 1981 a total of 1,483 million kilowatt-hours of electricity was produced, 357 million kilowatt-hours of which was from hydro plants. Further development of the country's hydroelectric potential was planned, as well as installation of at least one geothermal electric plant similar to one in El Salvador.

In 1981 sales of electricity amounted to 1,238 million kilowatt-hours, of which 38 percent went to industrial customers, 27 percent to residential units, 20 percent to commercial establishments, and 10 percent to national and local governments. Some industrial plants had their own generators. In the 1970s consumption of electricity increased rapidly, but service was primarily limited to the few major urban centers. In 1975 only about one-fifth of the population had electricity. By 1983 this figure had improved to perhaps one-third because of construction of transmission and distribution facilities and a rural electrification program.

### **Mining**

Mineral exploitation, apart from petroleum, has contributed very little to the economy. The country's deposits included nickel, copper, antimony, zinc, tin, lead, and tungsten. In the late 1970s small mines, largely in Huehuetenango, produced some lead, antimony, and tungsten. A copper mine in Alta Verapaz produced and exported about 12,000 tons of copper concentrate a year in the late 1970s. Marble, limestone, clay, and feldspar were produced largely for local consumption.

The country's only major mine, a little north of Lago de Izabal, was the nickel project of Exmibal (Exploraciones y Explotaciones Mineras de Izabal) to exploit proven reserves of 60 million tons of nickel ore. The company was owned by two international mining companies (American and Canadian). After 13 years of study and serious delays and cost overruns, the smelter began operations in 1977 with a capacity of 12,500 tons of nickel sulfide matte a year for export and refining abroad. In 1978 only 1,500 tons were produced and exported. Subsequent technical problems shut down operations, and a decline of world nickel prices hampered resumption of production. In 1983 it was not clear when nickel production would start up again. Nonetheless, the project represented a potential source of foreign exchange when international nickel markets revived.

### **Manufacturing**

Industrial development largely began in the 1930s and accelerated somewhat in the 1940s. By 1950 manufacturing contributed about 12 percent of GDP. It has since had periods of rapid growth, particularly in the early 1960s, but manufacturing remained about 16 percent of



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

GDP between 1967 and 1981, expanding at about the same rate as the whole economy. A number of problems kept manufacturing from being a more dynamic factor in the economy's growth.

The country's small size and population constituted an inadequate market for any production relying on economies of scale. A large part of the population participated in the money economy only to a limited extent, further reducing effective demand. An important and growing segment of the urban population was underemployed or received an income compatible with purchases of bare necessities at most. Only a small part of the population had an adequate and increasing income to buy products other than basic commodities, and many of those could afford and in fact often chose the quality and prestige of foreign-made goods. Guatemala was indeed a small market for domestic manufacturers.

Guatemala's neighbors also were plagued by small internal markets. In 1951 Guatemala, El Salvador, Honduras, Nicaragua, and Costa Rica, with the assistance of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America, prepared a plan for establishing the Central American Common Market (CACM). In subsequent years these countries signed a number of implementing treaties, and several administrative and technical organizations were established in conjunction with CACM. Panama was invited to join but did not. Honduras withdrew in 1971 after an armed conflict with El Salvador, although it maintained trade with most other members through bilateral arrangements.

In the 1960s CACM became a functioning entity that greatly influenced intraregional trade and Guatemala's industrial development. A common external tariff, largely based on the former schedules of Guatemala and El Salvador, provided considerable protection for developing industries while most domestic goods were freely traded between members. The Central American Bank for Economic Integration (CABEI) was created in 1961 to finance projects with regional implications. CABEI established a multilateral clearing mechanism for intraregional trade, using as the accounting unit the Central American peso (equal to US\$1) to avoid the use of convertible foreign exchange, which was chronically short among members. Fiscal incentives to encourage industrialization were standardized among members to avoid expensive competition. Attempts were made to limit large manufacturing plants producing for the region, in order to achieve economies of scale and to locate them in a balanced and fair way to benefit all members, but this integration process was handicapped by national development objectives of members.

In the 1960s CACM provided considerable stimulation to Guatemalan manufacturing. Local industrialists developed new products or expanded existing facilities to produce for the larger market. Foreign firms that had been exporting to Central America built assembly or production plants, several in Guatemala, to be inside the common external tariff. CACM spurred the growth of manufacturing and broad-

ened the range of Guatemalan goods produced, a substantial portion of which was exported to other members.

In the 1970s the stimulative effect of CACM weakened, and political differences between members increased. Markets for many products became saturated. Rapidly rising oil prices and internal economic difficulties slowed trade between members. Individual countries increasingly applied restrictions to imports from members. In 1972 Costa Rica temporarily withdrew. In 1975 Nicaragua subjected important Guatemalan exports to special restrictions because of adverse domestic economic conditions. Since 1975 efforts have been made to restructure CACM somewhat to give it new life. A draft treaty prepared in 1975 was discussed for several years before being shelved. By the early 1980s a new common external tariff was being drafted, but observers questioned whether agreement could be reached, given the old animosities among members and the growing political instability in the region. By mid-1983 it had not been signed. Substantial changes in the common external tariff or effective integration of planning and location of manufacturing could have important effects on Guatemalan industrial development in the 1980s if such accords were reached.

The underdevelopment of Guatemala has been a handicap to industrialization. Forty percent of all manufacturing and 75 percent of large-scale manufacturing were located in or around Guatemala City because of access to electricity, water, transportation, industrial workers, and the country's major market. In the 1980s the government offered fiscal incentives to locate industry in other departments; an industrial park and a free trade zone had been created to attract industry away from the capital. Almost all manufacturing was privately owned, frequently by a small group whose members were also involved in commercial farming, cattle raising, commerce, and finance. Private investments and retained profits financed the bulk of capital expenditures in manufacturing. The bulk of bank financing was primarily short term and went to larger enterprises.

Government primarily relied on private initiative to develop manufacturing, keeping its activities to a minimum. Fiscal incentives, tariff protection, and liberal treatment for foreign investments were the main activities, and these tended to foster capital-intensive processes and manufacturing establishments that lacked the efficiency to compete in unprotected foreign markets. In the 1970s creation of a state-owned development finance institution, an export promotion agency, and some other changes were small extensions of government activity to shape and encourage industrial development. But government planners stressed in the plan for the late 1970s that more involvement by government was needed for the country's development, including increased tax revenues to finance the required additions to services and infrastructure.

By the early 1980s manufacturing remained mainly small shops and cottage industry alongside a much smaller number of enterprises that accounted for the bulk of the value added. In 1975 the industrial work

force numbered some 219,000, about 67 percent of whom were in establishments of four or fewer workers. In contrast, the much smaller number of enterprises with five or more workers accounted for over 70 percent of the value added by manufacturing because of greater productivity resulting from power-driven machinery. Highlands Indian villages had a long tradition of specialized production of handicraft items, such as baskets, pottery, or tiles, which continued in the 1980s. Local bakeries, garages, and other small repair shops swelled the number of establishments essentially relying on hand labor. Most enterprises employing five or more were small scale; only a few of the larger enterprises approached the American conception of a modern manufacturing plant.

By the early 1980s manufacturing was primarily processing agricultural products for final consumption. In 1976 some 77 percent of the value added by manufacturing was consumer goods, mostly food and beverage processing, compared with 13 percent for intermediate materials, and 10 percent for capital equipment of an unsophisticated nature. Much of the food and drink was for local consumption. Some processed foods, textiles, garments, and footwear were among the country's most competitive exports. Intermediate products were primarily processed local products, such as wood, hides, and nonmetallic minerals. Manufacture of capital goods was largely processing imported metal into products, presumably partly used in construction.

Although manufacturing continued to be dominated by food and beverages, the structure of output was changing. In 1960 manufacturing of consumer goods accounted for 86 percent of the value added by the sector compared with 77 percent in 1976. This decline was caused primarily by the rapid growth of metal products and machinery, the main elements of capital goods production. Intermediate goods only slightly increased their contribution to value added by manufacturing, although the output of paper products increased sharply, particularly in the 1960s. The growth and direction of the manufacturing sector in the 1980s will depend largely on whether disposable income of the bulk of the population rises and expands the internal market and on the success officials achieve in increasing manufactured exports to countries outside Central America. Observers expected the political instability in CACM countries to limit their ability to import Guatemalan products during the next few years.

### **Banking and Monetary Policy**

The present financial system started in the mid-1920s with a government effort to exert control over note issue and banking. In May 1925 the quetzal, consisting of 100 centavos, replaced the peso as the national currency. The value of the quetzal was set to equal US\$1, a parity still existing in May 1983. As part of the currency reform, a private commercial bank, with partial government ownership, was designated to act as the central bank and to have the sole right to issue the national currency, replacing the uncontrolled issue of bank notes

by commercial banks that had previously occurred. The conflicting commercial activities and central bank duties of the bank designated to act as the central bank resulted in inadequate control of growing financial activities.

In 1946 major modifications were made which, with some subsequent legislation, comprised the banking system in the early 1980s. A nine-member Monetary Board set broad monetary, exchange, and credit policies for the country and directed the activities of the central bank. The board consisted of the president and vice president of the central bank, some economic ministers serving *ex officio*, and representatives from the University of San Carlos, state and private banks, and important national commercial, industrial, and agricultural associations. The president of the republic appointed the president, vice president, and the member of the faculty of the University of San Carlos for four-year terms. The others were elected members by their constituents for one year. Advisers could be added as needed, but they had no voting rights. The Superintendent of Banks was formed, subordinate to the Monetary Board, to inspect and police the banking system, including the central bank.

In February 1946 the Bank of Guatemala, government owned, was created as the country's central bank. It had responsibilities for issuing currency and maintaining its stability, setting reserve requirements for the banking system after Monetary Board approval, and implementing banking policy. The Bank of Guatemala functioned as the government's banker and fiscal agent. The foreign exchange department implemented exchange controls when needed. Except in times of balance of payments strains, foreign currency transactions were largely unrestricted and conducted through banks authorized to act as agents of the Bank of Guatemala. By the early 1980s, however, a shortage of foreign currencies required tight control of the inflow and outflow of foreign currencies by the central bank (see Balance of Payments, this ch.).

In the early 1980s the financial system consisted of a variety of institutions. Four public and quasi-public commercial banks operated, largely without government transfers. Eight private commercial banks were in operation, including two that were branches of foreign-owned banks. Two semipublic development banks for agriculture and housing were established in the early 1970s with capital contributions from the government and additional funds obtained from foreign loans, rediscounts from the central bank, and deposits. One public and three private finance companies (*financieras*) were engaged in long-term development loans, such as for agriculture, industry, and tourism, but they had to have separate capital and operations from commercial banks. The largest and most important was the public National Financial Corporation (Corporación Financiera Nacional—Corfina), which was funded by government capital subscription and by required contributions from private firms that benefited under the industrial incentives laws from exemptions of import duties. In addition, there

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

were trust funds, savings and loan cooperatives, insurance companies, and other, mostly small financial institutions. There was no stock exchange, and there were very limited markets for securities. Since 1966 foreign-owned insurance companies have been required to have increasing Guatemalan ownership and management as well as to hold a portion of reserves in specific domestic securities.

The financial system primarily was developed to supply short-term credit—for trade and working capital, for example. After the 1950s several institutions, mostly public, were added to supply longer term financing for development and housing. A basic difficulty was reaching the small farmers, traders, and potential industrialists in rural areas. The bulk of credit went to large, established businesses. The demand for credit until the late 1970s was moderate. The wealthy or large businesses usually could finance investments from their own resources and often had access to credit abroad. The small middle class and the poor majority used little consumer or investment credit. The government until the late 1970s had entered domestic credit markets only sparingly. Deposits, while growing, were concentrated in the hands of the wealthy. In the mid-1970s some 5 percent of depositors held about 90 percent of all deposits.

Banking liquidity and monetary policy were largely determined by developments in the balance of payments. Monetary policy was traditionally cautious. When export earnings began to fall, restrictive credit policies usually curbed imports. When export earnings were high, credit demand was often moderate, and the open economy permitted greater imports to keep prices stable. During the 1960s the urban consumer price index increased an average of under 1 percent a year. Between 1967 and 1976 the country's international reserves increased from US\$35 million to over US\$500 million, creating considerable excess liquidity in the banking system. Legal requirements on banks' capital-to-loan ratios limited the growth of credit because most banks were undercapitalized. By the mid-1970s domestic prices began to rise, however, largely reflecting increasing international prices of Guatemala's imports.

Reconstruction after the 1976 earthquake created scarcities of materials and manpower that added to pressures on prices. An inflow of foreign loans eased restrictions on imports, and some price controls moderated inflationary pressures. Between 1976 and 1978 the urban consumer price index rose an average of 10.4 percent a year, which was low by Latin American standards but high compared with Guatemala's previous experience. By 1978 the excess liquidity in the banking system had evaporated, and officials, faced with a credit squeeze, raised maximum interest rates while reducing reserve requirements for deposits. The higher interest rates slowed the outflow of funds from the country drawn by higher foreign interest rates and attracted additional domestic savings into banks.

The credit squeeze continued between 1979 and 1982 as the balance of payments deteriorated and the credit base shrank. Interest rate

ceilings were raised, and by 1981 credit became too costly for many Guatemalan producers. The international oil price jumps in 1979 and 1980 were a blow. Adverse weather and slowing exports to CACM countries affected agricultural and industrial production, and construction largely stagnated. As the economy slowed, prices continued to rise. In 1979 the inflation rate was 13.7 percent. Consumer prices rose 11 percent in 1980 and 1981. In 1982 consumer prices were expected to rise by less than 2 percent as the effects of the recession were felt. In the early 1980s the consumer price index became more questionable as an index of inflation, however, because of the price controls on major foods and some services. Official estimates of the GDP deflator (a broad measure of price changes used to adjust national accounts to a constant price base) rose 11 percent between mid-1981 and mid-1982, far more than consumer prices. The shortage of foreign exchange and the austerity program were expected to reduce imports sharply in 1983, creating scarcities and higher prices for many goods in the domestic market.

### **Foreign Trade**

Since at least the early 1950s growth of the economy was closely correlated to export earnings. Between 1975 and 1977 the world price for Guatemalan coffee rose almost fourfold while cotton prices nearly doubled. The result was a near doubling of export earnings in spite of a 50 percent decline in world sugar prices and less adverse changes in some other prices for Guatemalan exports. The increased export earnings of 1975-77 stimulated the economy as the depressed export prices since 1977 slowed the country's economic activity. Government tax revenues were also closely related to export earnings. In 1979 about 38 percent of central government taxes came from foreign trade, and additional revenues were collected as foreign trade goods moved through the economy.

The close link between exports and the growth of the modern economy pointed to diversification of export products as one way to avoid the cycles associated with world primary commodity prices. The formation of the CACM in the 1950s provided a major diversification of exports (see Manufacturing, this ch.). In 1981 exports to CACM members amounted to 31 percent of total exports, and almost all were manufactured products. CACM buyers took the bulk of Guatemala's exports of manufactures. The serious troubles facing CACM in the 1980s made it an uncertain market for the future. Officials were attempting to develop additional markets for manufactured goods outside CACM. In the 1970s an export promotion agency was established with several foreign offices. Important new mineral exports were crude oil and nickel matte, although exports of the latter were temporarily suspended in 1980 because of low world prices and technical problems. In 1982 Guatemalan exports of crude oil amounted to 1.6 million barrels worth US\$47 million.

After the 1950s considerable diversification of agricultural exports occurred. Coffee remained the country's foremost export, but in 1981

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

it accounted for only 24 percent of total exports compared with 70 percent in 1956. World prices made a substantial difference, however, accounting for most of the decline in coffee exports since 1977 when coffee amounted to 45 percent of total exports (see table 7, Appendix). Cotton was the other major export. Cardamom was a new export that grew rapidly, based on sales to the Middle East. Fruits (including canned and processed), flowers, and vegetables were additional newly developed export products.

The United States continued to be Guatemala's largest export market, purchasing US\$308 million in 1981. El Salvador was the second largest market, taking over one-half of all exports to CACM members in 1981 (see table 8, Appendix). The Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany) was the third largest market, purchasing US\$100 million of the country's products in 1981. Those three countries purchased almost one-half of total exports in 1981. The remainder was sold to many countries in Latin America, Europe, and the Far East.

By 1981 petroleum imports were the most important, accounting for 23 percent of all imports. Sources were primarily Mexico and Venezuela; the total was divided roughly equally between imports of refined products and crude oil. Imports of machinery and equipment remained high in the 1970s because of their importance to the country's economic development (see table 9, Appendix). Chemicals and basic manufactures contained many intermediate materials used in industrial and agricultural production. Of concern to officials was the growth of food imports, because the country had formerly been largely self-sufficient.

Industrialized countries were the main source of imports apart from fuels. In 1981 the United States (US\$561 million), Japan (US\$129 million), and West Germany (US\$108 million) were the three most important suppliers and along with Mexico and Venezuela (for fuels) accounted for 62 percent of imports. CACM members supplied 12 percent of imports, largely fats and vegetable oils. Remaining imports were supplied by countries throughout the world.

Foreign trade was very important in the society's modern economy. In 1981 imports were almost one-fifth of GDP. After the 1950s the economy had become much more dependent on imports for fuels to energize activities, for material and equipment for production, and even for food as population growth outpaced increases in basic food products. Barring a major oil find, greater exports will be difficult to achieve. Even with reactivation of CACM, substantial increases of manufactured exports will require greater efficiency and competitiveness to compete in either CACM or other markets. Economists have long regarded the government's agricultural policies and activities as inadequate, whether they concerned export crops or subsistence farming.

## **Balance of Payments**

Guatemala has had recurring balance of payments difficulties over

the years, largely because of the swings of world prices affecting the country's exports. It remained to be seen if the problems of the first half of the 1980s were more serious than those that preceded it. But in 1983 the economy was depressed, and the balance of payments appeared likely to constrain growth and development over the next few years. Continuing and important elements were the political instability and armed insurgency in Guatemala and its Central American neighbors. The whole area was in varying degrees of turmoil.

The causes of Guatemala's 1981 balance of payments difficulties were simple to list. The second oil crisis, of 1979 and 1980, which entailed large jumps in the price of crude oil, along with other factors, induced recession or stagnation in many countries that bought Guatemalan products. Loss of export earnings affected not only the country's most important products—coffee, cotton, and sugar—but numerous other products exported to various parts of the world, including CACM. Guatemala had had a positive trade balance in its trade with CACM members since 1964, but in 1980 and 1981 about a US\$200 million favorable balance developed on the clearing accounts that the indebted CACM members lacked the foreign currency to settle. Thus, Guatemala had about US\$200 million in reserve that could not be used. In addition, large government projects, particularly for hydroelectric power plants, committed expenditure and imports several years in the future that could not be canceled without large losses.

The insurgency caused, to an uncertain extent, a flight of capital and a reluctance to commit funds by domestic and foreign investors. The insurgency was also an important factor in causing tourist earnings to decline from US\$82 million in 1979 to perhaps US\$15 million in 1982. The insurgency contributed to the cautious attitude of world bankers preceding the debt crisis of developing countries in 1982. Although Guatemala had a small external debt and was not cause for concern comparable with Mexico, Brazil, and Argentina, foreign private commercial banks shut off Guatemala's international credit in August 1981. Domestic policies, such as the failure to adjust interest rates when those abroad rose, contributed to the outflow of foreign currencies. Officials of the Ríos Montt government also accused the preceding government of corruption and mismanagement that affected international reserves.

Balance of payments difficulties began to emerge in 1978 when the trade balance became unfavorable. As a result, the adverse 1978 current account balance increased to US\$262 million compared with US\$35 million in 1977 (see table 10, Appendix). After a slight improvement in 1980, the current account negative balance increased to US\$565 million in 1981. Capital inflows were partially offset after 1978 by outflows of private capital. Beginning in 1979 international reserves were drawn down to meet international payments, amounting to US\$249 million in 1980 and US\$180 million in 1981. Exchange controls were introduced in April 1980 to regulate foreign currency payments and transfers.



### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

Monetary authorities opted to maintain the quetzal at parity to US\$1, although limiting convertibility at that rate and imposing austerity on the economy. In 1981 standby loans of US\$110 million, including US\$89 million of compensatory financing, were arranged with the IMF, and drawings began. Nonetheless, the shortage of foreign exchange became worse in 1982. The central bank could release foreign exchange only as fast as it was earned. By mid-1982 unfilled orders for foreign exchange by importers amounted to US\$300-US\$400 million. Importers were forced to wait several months to pay their foreign bills, resulting in declining credit standings. In November 1982 monetary officials imposed very harsh measures to stabilize the balance of payments. Imports were subjected to licensing and quotas to lower 1983 imports perhaps by as much as 35 percent from 1982. Some quotas barred nonessential imports while others limited imports to varying fractions compared with 1982. Foreign travel and payments by Guatemalans were considerably restricted. The measures were stern and were subjected to strong criticism by parts of the business community, even though the government had little alternative in the short run. The foreign exchange crisis was severe.

One possible alternative to ease the growing balance of payments problems was greater foreign borrowing by the government, particularly concessionary loans from bilateral and multilateral sources. United States aid amounted to US\$203 million between 1967 and 1981. Additional aid came from West Germany, Mexico, and Venezuela, for example. A number of loans also were received from the World Bank (see Glossary) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). Use of such foreign aid amounted to US\$135 million in 1979, US\$115 million in 1980, and US\$181 million in 1981. Nonetheless, United States policy in the late 1970s discouraged aid to Guatemala, except that directly meeting the population's basic needs, such as food, because of its violations of human rights. This policy resulted in less assistance from the United States and major multilateral institutions than in earlier years. By 1982 the United States policy had been eased. Reportedly, Guatemala had six loans totaling some US\$170 million for development purposes near approval by the World Bank and IDB in late 1982.

Guatemalan officials have been cautious about incurring foreign debts. By the end of 1982 the country's public foreign external debt amounted to only about US\$860 million, the lowest on a per capita basis in Latin America. Debt servicing (principal and interest) in 1981 amounted to US\$48 million, less than 4 percent of exports. In mid-1983 Ríos Montt indicated a continually cautious approach to foreign debt, saying that the country had no intention of borrowing its way out of its present difficulties. The economic austerity program his administration had adopted confirmed his statements.

Guatemala has survived numerous balance of payments crises. This one will pass, but at what economic and political costs was unclear. Austerity was likely to extend into the mid-1980s unless world prices for Guatemalan exports substantially and quickly improved. In the

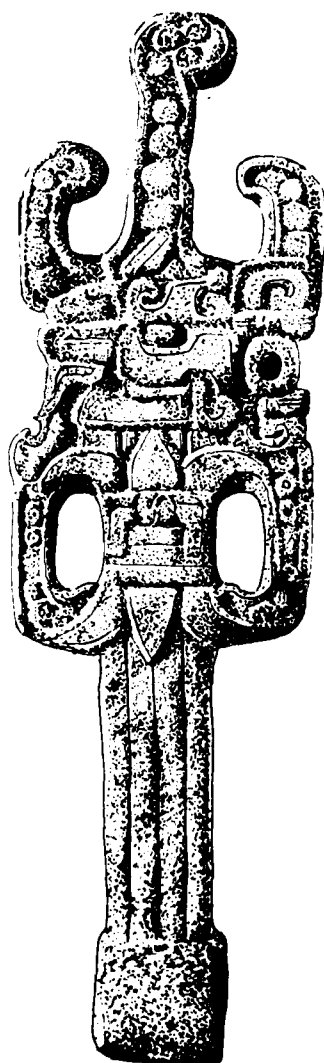
### *The Economy*

longer term, the outlook could be favorable if government policies developed the substantial potential for increased agricultural yields and industrial development, based on a larger internal market resulting from a more equitable distribution of incomes.

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As of mid-1983 the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development's *Guatemala: Economic and Social Position and Prospects* is the most recent (1978) and comprehensive review of the economy and contains considerable statistical data. The AID consultant study under Richard Hough, *Land and Labor in Guatemala: An Assessment*, presents data on landholdings and shows the difficulty of extending cultivation. Waldemar Smith's *The Fiesta System and Economic Change* provides insights into rural life and changes over time of the Highlands Indians. Stacy May and Galo Plaza's *The United Fruit Company in Latin America*, though dated, surveys banana cultivation and marketing from the business point of view. An annual IDB report, *Economic and Social Progress in Latin America*, provides brief summaries of recent economic developments. The Bank of Guatemala's quarterly *Boletín estadístico* has the most up-to-date statistics readily available, and its annual *Estudio económico y memoria de labores* has Spanish text and more extensive statistical tables on the economy. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 4. Government and Politics



*Sculpture on a pedestal, circa 500-100 B.C., Guatemalan Highlands*

**GUATEMALAN POLITICAL REALITY** in the early 1980s was a complex and rapidly changing dynamic involving the interaction among contrasting forces of society. Military and civilian, Indian and ladino, dictatorship and democracy, Christian fundamentalism and Marxism-Leninism, war and peace—all played a role in the Byzantine world of Guatemalan politics. The leading actor remained, as it had been for two decades, the Guatemalan Army. Its highest ranking officer was president of the republic and, as such, had the authority to act as arbiter over the political process. But the 1982 coup d'état that brought Brigadier General José Efraín Ríos Montt to power revealed deep cleavages within the military institution itself. Much effort during his first year in power was directed toward attempting to resolve the conflicts that had infected the entire polity during the regime of his predecessor, Brigadier General Fernando Romeo Lucas García.

Guatemalan politics were incomprehensible outside the nation's geographical and historical contexts. A revolution in 1944 ended a century-old tradition of strongman rule. For the first time since the birth of Guatemala as an independent republic in 1847, the popular political forces of peasants and urban workers were unleashed. A counter-revolution in 1954 was able to cap, but not extinguish, these forces that had been given expression during the previous decade. Since 1954 every government has had to face the residual effects of the revolutionary period; most have chosen to crush popular expression.

By the late 1970s a lingering rural guerrilla army was beginning to attract adherents among the Indians, who make up approximately one-half of the nation's population and whose political quiescence had been a given since the Spanish conquest nearly five centuries ago. The prospect of one-half of the population in open rebellion against a system that had long kept them at the bottom of the social hierarchy set off alarm bells within the ruling elite. Violence against the opposition, which those in power equated with the growing ranks of revolutionaries, reached major proportions.

The coming to power of the revolutionary Sandinista government in Nicaragua sounded another alarm in 1979, and the ferment that engulfed Central America during the next four years had a profound effect on Guatemala, the region's wealthiest and most populous nation. Of greatest concern in 1983 was the struggle taking place in El Salvador, which borders Guatemala on the south. Observers at that time agreed that a victory in El Salvador by either the revolutionary left or a government of the extreme right would make a peaceful, moderate solution to Guatemala's political problems even more difficult.

### **The Dominant Role of the Army**

Military officers have dominated the Guatemalan political system for most of the twentieth century. Three officers held the presidency during the years 1922 to 1944. The overthrow of Jorge Ubico in the

latter year, which heralded a decade of revolutionary change that remains central to an understanding of modern Guatemalan politics, also inaugurated a new era in the political role of the military (see *The Abortive Revolution*, ch. 4; *Military Traditions*, ch. 5). As the last Guatemalan caudillo, he was the last military strongman whose dictatorial power was personalistic; since 1944 the political role of the army (*ejército*; the air force and navy are subordinate to the army) has been institutional, that is, the military institution, rather than a personality in military garb, has been an actor. Its role continued to grow substantially until, by 1983, the army played the overwhelmingly dominant political role in society.

Disgruntled officers, tired of corruption and jealous of Ubico's monopoly on the trappings of power, were instrumental in his downfall, and for a short time afterward a triumvirate of two military officers and one civilian assumed executive powers. The officers, Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán and Major Francisco Javier Arana, were by no means in accord, however, and a power struggle soon developed between them. In 1949 Arana was assassinated, and many army officers believed that Arbenz or his associates were directly responsible. In 1950 Arbenz, who had served as minister of national defense but who styled himself "the soldier of the people," was elected president. Arbenz failed to retain the loyalty of his former military colleagues, and the army's refusal to defend him against the ragtag forces of Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas in 1954 contributed to his fall from power (see *Foreign Interests*, ch. 4).

Castillo Armas had led a revolt in 1950 as a result of Arana's death. He failed, was pardoned, and went into self-imposed exile in Honduras where, with the assistance of the governments of the United States, Nicaragua, and Honduras, he then launched an invasion in June 1954. With fewer than 200 men, one heavy machine gun, and a B-26 bomber provided by the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA), Castillo Armas was able to seize power and put an end to Guatemala's 10-year-old revolution. The events of 1954 would prove to be even more crucial than the revolutionary decade in the evolution of the modern Guatemalan political system.

In October 1954 Castillo Armas held a plebiscite in an attempt to legitimize his usurpation of power. The results were never officially released, but reportedly some one-half million votes were cast—orally and publicly—and fewer than 400 were negative. Castillo Armas then set out to reverse 10 years of revolutionary change. Land reform legislation was abrogated, and millions of hectares were returned to their former owners. Police powers were increased, and thousands of politicians, labor union leaders, peasants, and liberal bureaucrats were purged, exiled, jailed, or executed. Together with a number of large landowners, Castillo Armas organized the National Democratic Movement (Movimiento Democrático Nacional—MDN), a political party that would come to be the expression of the extreme, and often violent,

Guatemalan right wing (see Political Parties, this ch.). Castillo Armas was assassinated in July 1957 by a member of his own entourage.

After months of haggling that exposed deep divisions within the civilian political elite as well as the officer corps, the results of the January 1958 elections were upheld, and Brigadier General (retired) Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, who had served as an aide to former president Ubico, assumed the presidency in March. His rule was corrupt and stormy; political divisions within the army widened and were punctuated by periodic coup attempts. On November 13, 1960, after it became known that Ydígoras was permitting the United States to train troops on Guatemalan soil for the ill-fated Bay of Pigs invasion of Cuba, a group of leftist-nationalist soldiers led by Colonel Rafael Periera and lieutenants Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis Augusto Turcios Lima rebelled. Although the coup attempt failed, some of its leaders escaped to organize a rural-based guerrilla movement that would challenge military regimes for decades into the future (see Threats to Internal Security, ch. 5).

Widespread public disturbances in March and April 1962 brought military officers into cabinet posts and other key government positions, leaving Ydígoras little real power. In another unsuccessful coup attempt in November 1962, air force rebels bombed the capital city. A March 1963 coup led by Ydígoras' minister of national defense, Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, was successful. Peralta justified his action on the pretext that former president Juan José Arévalo (1944-50), whom Ydígoras had suggested could return from exile to run for president in elections scheduled for later that year, was a dangerous leftist radical and unacceptable to the army.

The year 1963 marked another watershed in the nation's modern political evolution. With respect to the evolution of army dominance, the year was pivotal. The army's grasp of the reins of government, which had been covert since early 1962, now became overt for the first time. As chief of state (he never assumed the title of president), Peralta retained active-duty status and filled the key political posts with his military subordinates. He suspended the constitution, declared a state of siege, sent the elected Congress into recess, and suspended citizens' political rights. Such events set a precedent in Guatemala and presented a style of rule that would be copied by military institutions that seized power in Brazil in 1964, Bolivia in 1971, Chile and Uruguay in 1973, and Argentina in 1976.

The 1963-82 period witnessed almost constant turbulence of one sort or another, as well as the gradual consolidation of the army's position at the top of the nation's political and economic elite. Numerous innovations during the early to mid-1960s were crucial in this process of consolidation. At the request of President Ydígoras, in 1960 the United States sent a civic action team to train the Guatemalan Army in the administration of various public programs providing such services as literacy training, school lunches, and inoculation against disease. Within the framework of the incipient Alliance for Progress, such pro-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

grams were to have the dual purpose of meeting the basic needs of the rural poor and, at the same time, serving as a counterinsurgency tool that would enhance the public image of the government and its armed forces among potential guerrilla recruits. As civic action and other programs subsequently grew, United States military aid to Guatemala increased from some US\$250,000 in 1960 to US\$3.7 million in 1963, then leveled out at approximately US\$2 million annually for the remainder of the decade. In addition to heightening the visibility of the army in rural areas where few government services had previously existed, the prestige of the army was greatly enhanced by the unprecedented infusion of foreign military assistance (see Foreign Military Influence, ch. 5).

Another innovation was the drastic revision, during the Peralta Azurdia regime, of the old system of *comisionados militares* (military commissioners). Before 1963 military commissioners had been army reserve appointees whose principal task had been to gather local conscripts and deliver them to the army. Under Peralta, military commissioners became spies, reporting local incidents of any interest—particularly political events—to authorities who would pass the information directly to Peralta's general staff. The system became pervasive and widespread: in 1965 it was reported in one department that one of every 50 adult males had been appointed a commissioner. It was during this period that the *judiciales*, a police force under the supervision of the Ministry of Government (*gobernación*; sometimes called Ministry of Interior), became active in pursuing political opponents of the regime (see Law Enforcement, ch. 5).

To the surprise of the overconfident Peralta, a civilian, Julio César Méndez Montenegro, defeated two military candidates in the 1966 presidential election. Méndez was not allowed to take office, however, until he signed a pact giving the military hierarchy the power to name the minister of national defense and to retain unhampered control over counterinsurgency operations against the mounting guerrilla threat posed by the survivors of the 1960 military revolt and their leftist recruits. The new regime was quick to declare a state of siege—a form of martial law—and to request United States counterinsurgency advisers. By early 1968 the rural guerrillas had been eliminated in repeated search-and-destroy missions costing several thousand civilian lives. The center of the operations was in the department of Zacapa, which was commanded by Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio (see fig. 1). This period also saw the emergence of the death squads—civilian vigilante organizations—which functioned at times in conjunction with the military and at other times independently to murder suspected guerrillas, guerrilla sympathizers, and others perceived to fall within an extremely broad definition of "communist."

Terrorist operations, by both the left and the right, continued after the end of the guerrilla campaign in 1968. Three of the guerrillas' early victims were a United States ambassador, a director of the United States military mission, and a United States naval attaché. For reasons



of insubordination, the result of an incident never fully explained. Arana Osorio was sent into "diplomatic exile" as ambassador to Nicaragua in 1968. He returned in 1970 to run a successful campaign for the presidency during which he promised to eradicate terrorism by whatever means necessary.

Government officials acknowledge that over 1,000 persons were killed during the first year of Arana's presidency; independent estimates are at least twice that high (see The 1970s, ch. 1). The level of political violence varied over the next 12 years, but its existence was institutionalized as the central aspect of a political system that would remain intact during three presidential terms. Professor Caesar Sereseres of the University of California at Irvine termed the process the "*esquema político*," noting that the "political order that evolved depended on tacit understandings among the military institution, the private sector, and the political parties to create a facade of democratic politics, marked by periodic elections . . . . The concern was to depoliticize such organizations [outside the *esquema*] as the labor movement, rural cooperatives, and the university."

Arana Osorio filled most key government positions with loyal, trusted fellow officers who had been his subordinates during the Zacapa campaign. Presidents Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García (1974-78) and Lucas García (1978-82) were also veterans of Zacapa, as was Brigadier General Angel Anibal Guevara, who was declared winner of the aborted 1982 presidential contest.

Although personal loyalty to Arana arose from the shared experience of a large number of officers in the Zacapa campaign, military loyalties also stemmed from masonic-like support groups within the officer corps. Students who emerge from the military academy, the Escuela Politécnica (Polytechnical School), in the same *promoción* (in this context, the graduating class) are bound to support one another throughout their military careers. Another basis of mutual support is the so-called *centenario* (literally, centenary). Each graduate is assigned a number, for example, the 20 graduates in one year may be numbered 180 through 199, and the 50 graduates the following year are assigned 200 through 249. The *centenario* system binds graduate number 149, as an example, to support graduates 49, 249, 349, etc. throughout his career. Thus, a bond is created both within and across graduating classes. This support naturally gained political significance as the officer corps assumed a dominant position within the political system.

Many of Arana Osorio's colleagues in Zacapa shared the same *promoción*. *Promoción 45* (class of 1945) was said to be dominant among those who held power from 1970 to 1982; one leader of *promoción 45* was Brigadier General Otto Spiegelner Noriega, who was also a Zacapa veteran and later served as minister of national defense for Laugerud and Lucas García. Neither the Zacapa veterans nor *promoción 45* were homogeneous in political outlook or, especially, in their style of rule. Compared with Arana, Laugerud was liberal, and Lucas García was incompetent. The three regimes did share fierce anticommunism and

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

a determination to improve the lot of the military institution, but particularly themselves and their immediate entourage, while in power.

Army officers had been improving their status since 1963 when the institution first took the reins of government. Holding key executive, advisory, and administrative positions, including the directorships of burgeoning autonomous corporations, officers were able to legislate and administer an impressive array of privileges. By the mid-1960s the officer corps had gained access to duty-free imported goods and discounted domestic merchandise, subsidized housing, free servants, doctors, cars, and other luxuries, liberal retirement benefits, and virtual immunity from civil judicial authority. President Arana substantially increased the financial security of officers by establishing the Bank of the Army (Banco del Ejército), the Military Social Security Institute (Instituto Previsión Militar), and a number of business enterprises (including a television station and a cement factory) under the aegis of the army. Other activities, such as business and land deals that made many senior officers rich men, were less publicly visible. It was not unnoticed, however, that by the late 1970s Arana Osorio and Peralta Azurdia were successful industrialists and that Lucas García and Spiegeler were two large landowners.

Corruption flourished during the regime of Lucas García. The largest scheme involved properties in the oil- and mineral-rich Northern Transversal Strip (Franja Transversal del Norte) which, having been bought or expropriated by the state, were then passed on to key officers and their civilian supporters. According to an official of the United States Department of State, these properties had been returned by early 1983. The North American Congress on Latin America, however, reported that in early 1983 Lucas García held over 40,000 hectares of land in the strip. Another scheme allegedly involved arms purchases from Italy, Belgium, Yugoslavia, and Israel. Over a six-year period, eight generals were said to have charged the government the equivalent of US\$425 million for weapons that in fact had cost US\$175 million. When this was exposed in mid-1981 by a group of dissident army officers, at a time when soldiers were faring poorly against a growing guerrilla army, it had a devastating impact.

Political costs also accrued to Lucas García as a result of the distribution of the spoils from corrupt activities. The major beneficiaries were said to have been a small group of civilian confidants, especially his cousins the García Granados brothers, Jorge and Raul, and a group of officers from *promoción* 60. The special treatment of this clique around the president was widely resented within the officer corps, but particularly by the senior officers of *promoción* 45 and the Zacapa group, to whom Lucas García's favoritism seemed a betrayal of old loyalties. By early 1982 the effects of the allegations of corruption, the increasing fatalities among soldiers and junior officers in a war against a growing guerrilla threat, and the isolation of the regime, which was becoming internationally renowned for its poor human rights record, combined to produce a crisis within the military institution that threat-

ened the hierarchical structure of command and ultimately the army's domination of the political system. Lucas García had not helped matters any by his frequent shifting of army personnel between command positions in an apparent effort to prevent officers from building stable, independent bases of power.

Lucas García's fears were well-founded: plots to overthrow him had been brewing since at least 1981. When the coup d'état came on March 23, 1982, there were at least two plots afoot, including one organized among junior officers by Leonel Sisniega Otero, the most recent vice-presidential candidate of the MLN. Other junior and middle-ranking officers, organized by Captain Carlos Rodolfo Muñoz Pilona and with the backing of senior air force officers, acted first, however. Their tanks surrounded the National Palace, and Lucas García and other top officers were arrested (see *The 1982 Coup d'Etat*, ch. 5).

Initially this group, which came to be known simply as the young officers, asked the Sisniega group to join them. General Ríos Montt was called to head a Military Junta of Government. After several hours of confusion the Sisniega group was sidelined, and two senior army officers—Brigadier General Egberto Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez—were named to round out the junta. It was the first successful coup since 1963.

### **A Transition to Democracy?**

The junta soon announced the annulment of the March 7 elections, the dismissal of all elected officials, and the abrogation of the 1965 constitution. The new military government was to be a transitional regime, whose declared purposes were to end the abuses of power that had become institutionalized under Lucas García, particularly the corruption and rampant violence against the citizenry, restore the tarnished international image of the nation to one of respectability, and then oversee the transfer of power to a popularly elected government.

The disbanding of two police forces under the Ministry of Government, the Detective Corps (*Cuerpo de Detectives*—also known as the *judiciales*) and the Sixth Commando (*Comando Seis*), brought a sudden and dramatic decline in the level of violence in the capital. This act brought immediate support to the new regime from the citizens of Guatemala City, who had learned to approach the proclamations of military rulers with considerable skepticism. Another indication that the new regime would be true to its word in this regard came in May, when the occupation of the Brazilian embassy by opponents of the regime ended, not in the horrible violence of a similar incident in 1980, but with the occupiers' being flown out of the country.

Although relative calm came to the capital after March 23, fighting in rural areas of western Guatemala increased. Another major objective of the new government, not announced publicly but widely discussed among military officers at the time, was to gain the offensive in the ever-widening rural guerrilla war. By May the stepped-up counter-insurgency campaign by the army elicited a sharp protest from Gua-

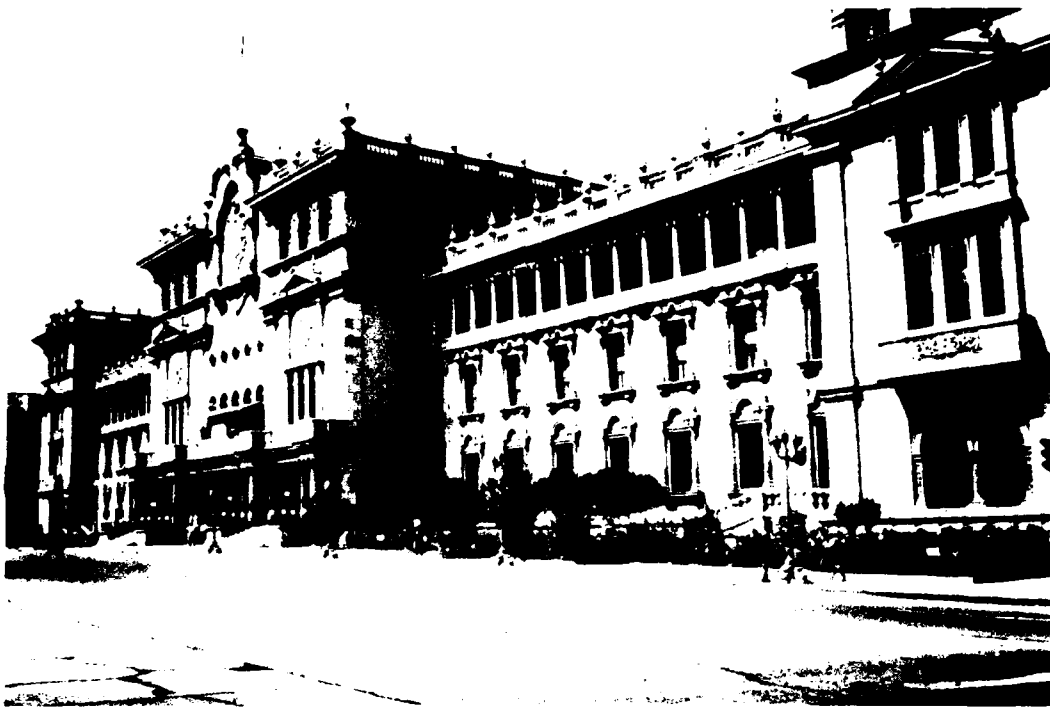
temala's Roman Catholic bishops: "With profound sorrow," read their statement, "we have learned and verified the suffering of our people by these massacres . . . . Never in our national history has it come to such grave extremes." Two editorials in the daily *El Gráfico* denounced the "massacres [that] have become the order of the day." "This new resurgence of mass murders," concluded a signed editorial of May 20, "sends the message that Guatemala is very far from peace, or even a decrease in violence."

The army nevertheless remained determined to achieve its military objectives. The state of siege, proclaimed on July 1, brought an end to such protests by instituting strict press censorship over matters pertaining to the war or politics (see *The State of Siege*, ch. 5). Fighting intensified during the next three months, and in October Amnesty International issued a statement reporting the deaths of 2,600 peasants during the regime's first six months in power. Under the state of siege, kidnappings and disappearances persisted in the capital as well. Most were attributed to the armed forces. By the time the state of siege was lifted in March 1983, the army had achieved considerable success in its rural counterinsurgency campaign, though fierce fighting continued in some areas; urban violence continued, though at a lower level than before the 1982 coup (see *Threats to Internal Security*, ch. 5).

The high cost of the campaign in terms of noncombatant, civilian casualties had a very negative effect on the regime's international image. Highly publicized executions by firing squads of persons convicted in secret trials by special courts also did not help the regime's previously stated goal of restoring the respectability of Guatemala in the eyes of the world. After a year of power, the new regime could claim little, if any, success in overcoming Guatemala's international isolation (see *Foreign Relations*, this ch.).

The anticorruption drive proved moderately successful. Several hundred army personnel and civil servants accused of corrupt practices under the Lucas García regime were reportedly dismissed. Possibly more important, however, was the public perception that Ríos Montt, as a deeply religious man, was himself honest. High government officials wore logos on their lapels reading "I don't steal. I don't lie. I don't abuse." Critics pointed out, nevertheless, that after one year in power the new government had not prosecuted Lucas García or any of the prominent officials of his regime who were widely viewed as guilty of corrupt practices.

The new regime's efforts with respect to overseeing a transition to democracy were mixed. Its first months saw the gradual consolidation of a dictatorship: in June Ríos Montt ousted his two colleagues on the junta and proclaimed himself president of the republic, and the state of siege decreed the following month gave him almost unlimited legal powers. These powers stretched beyond those of previous Guatemalan dictators in such areas as the appointment and dismissal of judges and local government officials.



*National Palace, Guatemala City  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph*

It was not until March 23, 1983, the first anniversary of the coup, that President Rios Montt announced the first steps of the transition. The state of siege was lifted, and new regulations were announced that would allow political parties, which had been legally abolished for a year, to begin organizational efforts in order to regain legal status and would lead to the creation of an Electoral Registry, which would write a new electoral code and oversee constituent assembly elections. At the time nearly all the nation's civilian political figures expressed disappointment that the new regulations were not accompanied by a timetable that would indicate when the military regime would step down in favor of the promised democratically elected government.

As had been the case for at least 20 years, the timetable, as well as every other major question of government policy, ultimately would be answered within the Guatemalan Army. Its dominance over the political system grew during Rios Montt's first year in power, and it became more entrenched than ever in the administration of government, taking control of the Guatemalan Institute of Social Security, certain police functions, and the administration of local governments.

By no means, however, was the army united in its political stance. The 1982 coup was a double-edged sword, for while it halted what

### *Guatemala. A Country Study*

many observers called the imminent breakdown of the army's hierarchical chain of command under the corrupt and incompetent Lucas García regime, it also set an example of effective insubordination by lower ranking officers. Ríos Montt's first year in power saw a number of coup attempts and rumors of coups. At least one of these, in August, reportedly involved Sisniega and other individuals of the extreme right-wing political parties who retained their loyal following among a group of junior officers opposed to the young officers in power. Another coup attempt, in October 1982, allegedly involved Colonel Gordillo, the ousted junta member, who was subsequently arrested and discharged from the army. Outside observers estimated that a total of 50 to 200 officers were relieved of their duties during the year.

Ríos Montt's efforts to rein in the paramilitary death squads were also bound to create enemies on his right. Most foreign observers agreed in early 1983 that these elements, in conjunction with the fiercely nationalistic and "hard-line" army officers who had enjoyed immense power from 1970 to 1982, posed the major coup threat to Ríos Montt. Their most influential spokesman in the government at that time was Minister of National Defense Brigadier General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores, who played a major policymaking role within the regime.

## **Formal Structure of Government**

### **Constitutional Basis**

Since becoming a republic in 1847, Guatemala has been governed under a number of constitutions. In the post-World War II era the constitutions have been short lived. The 1945 supreme law might be called the "revolutionary constitution," which was followed in 1956 by the "counterrevolutionary constitution" and in 1965 by the "military constitution." The descriptions of the working bodies of government changed little from one document to the next. Major changes were made, however, in such areas as the political and social rights of citizens, the social and economic responsibilities of the state, and the power of the state to curb the rights of its citizens.

On the assumption of power on March 23, 1982, the new government suspended the 1965 constitution, dismissed the popularly elected Congress, and began to rule by decree. Decree Law 24-82, dated April 26, 1982, is titled the Fundamental Statute of Government and, as subsequently modified, continued to function as the nation's constitutional law in mid-1983. The Fundamental Statute was to be replaced by a new constitution, to be written by an elected constituent assembly, at an unspecified date in the future. Until that time it is, as stated in Article 5, "to guide the nation toward a democratic political system and a government chosen in popular elections."

The principal innovation of the Fundamental Statute, however, lies in its lack of further reference to democratic institutions. Absent are such features of the 1965 constitution as articles governing political parties, elections, or any popularly elected governmental body. Not

only does the executive rule by decree, but it also appoints municipal governmental authorities who formerly had been popularly elected. Beyond these features, there is little about the Fundamental Statute of Government that is extraordinary: its 120 articles outline laws governing citizenship and nationality, individual and collective guarantees, and the makeup and functions of the various organs of government.

Six weeks after issuing the Fundamental Statute, Ríos Montt dismissed the other two junta members and declared himself president of the republic. Decree Law 36-82, dated June 9, 1982, appropriately modified the Fundamental Statute by removing executive and legislative powers from the Military Junta of Government and placing them solely in the hands of the president.

Decree Law 45-82, dated July 1, 1982, further modified the constitutional basis of the regime by declaring a 30-day renewable state of siege. Nationwide martial law suspended individual guarantees listed in the Fundamental Statute—imposed restrictions on public gatherings, prohibited labor union activity, and placed severe restrictions on the mass media. The state of siege was periodically renewed until March 22, 1983, when it was lifted as the first steps were taken toward a promised political opening.

### **Executive**

The Fundamental Statute of Government assigns extraordinary powers to the executive branch of government. As the chief executive, the president not only rules by decree but is also authorized to name virtually all government functionaries with the exceptions of the rector of the state-run University of San Carlos, which remained legally autonomous, and lower court judges, who were named by executive-appointed judges of the Supreme Court. In fact, Ríos Montt delegated part of his power of appointment to nongovernmental interest associations during the first year of his rule. Several cabinet officials were named in this corporatist-style fashion, as were many members of the Council of State.

Formal power, then, was highly concentrated in Ríos Montt as both president of the republic and general commander of the army. (He also served as *minister of national defense* for several months after the 1982 coup.) Outside observers agreed, however, that in late 1982 and early 1983 real power was shared with other military officers holding executive positions *formally subordinate to the president*. The most important of these were Minister of National Defense General Mejía Victores, who presided over the military hierarchy, and lower ranking officers within the General Staff of the Presidency, which was staffed by the leaders of the young officers who overthrew Lucas García and placed Ríos Montt in power.

The power of the General Staff of the Army, whose chief in mid-1983 was Brigadier General Héctor Mario López Fuentes, lay, of course, in its command over the armed forces (see Administration, Organization, and Training, ch. 5). The power of the General Staff of the Presidency, whose chief was Colonel Víctor Manuel Argueta Villalta,

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

lay largely in its inclusion of the leaders of the 1982 young officers' rebellion, who continued to retain a constituency within the lower ranks of the officer corps. The General Staff of the Presidency also controlled the president's closest intelligence and internal security organization, which had the odd name of General Archives and Supporting Services of the General Staff of the Presidency (Archivos Generales y Servicios Apoyados del Estado Mayor Presidencial—AGSAEMP).

The president's closest advisers, who were in a clearly subordinate position, were found within the Office of the Presidency of the Republic (see fig. 5). Here were found approximately 15 small bureaucracies, a number of which were known as secretariats (*secretarías*) where, apart from the formal presidential cabinet, some of the most important executive functions were performed. In addition to the president's private secretary and his secretary for public relations, the offices included secretariats for social welfare and for mining, hydrocarbons, and nuclear energy; the National Council of Economic Planning; the Coordinating Unit for Presidential Projects; the Directorate for Community Development; the Committee for National Reconstruction, and other key organizations. These offices also existed under previous regimes. Ríos Montt added at least three positions within the Office of the Presidency known as *personeros de la presidencia* (agents or solicitors of the presidency). In early 1983 one *personero* was said to be working on relations with organized labor, another in matters pertaining to international aid programs, and a third in community development projects as part of the counterinsurgency program in the western Highlands (see Local Government, this ch.).

A majority of the positions within the Office of the Presidency were filled by civilians. The position of general secretary, however, was filled by Colonel Manuel de Jesús Girón Tánchez, and the Committee for National Reconstruction was headed by Brigadier General Federico Fuentes Corado. Two important officials, Secretary for Personal Affairs Francisco Bianchi Castillo and Private Secretary Sergio Alvaro Contreras Valladeres, were elders of Ríos Montt's own Church of the Word (Iglesia del Verbo), while the *personero* in charge of community development, Harris Whitbeck, was an active evangelical Protestant (see Religious Institutions, this ch.).

The 10 ministers of state who make up the president's cabinet lost considerable clout in early 1983 when it was announced that all ministerial decrees would henceforth be centralized and would emanate from the Office of the Presidency. Thereafter, the major significance of the ministries lay in their administrative authority over numerous dependent bureaucracies (the most important were known as *direcciones*, or directorates) and, to a lesser extent, over numerous decentralized institutions (sometimes known as autonomous or semiautonomous agencies or government corporations) that held various degrees of autonomy from the central government. Retaining considerable importance were the Ministry of National Defense and the Ministry of Government, whose power derived from their authority over the army



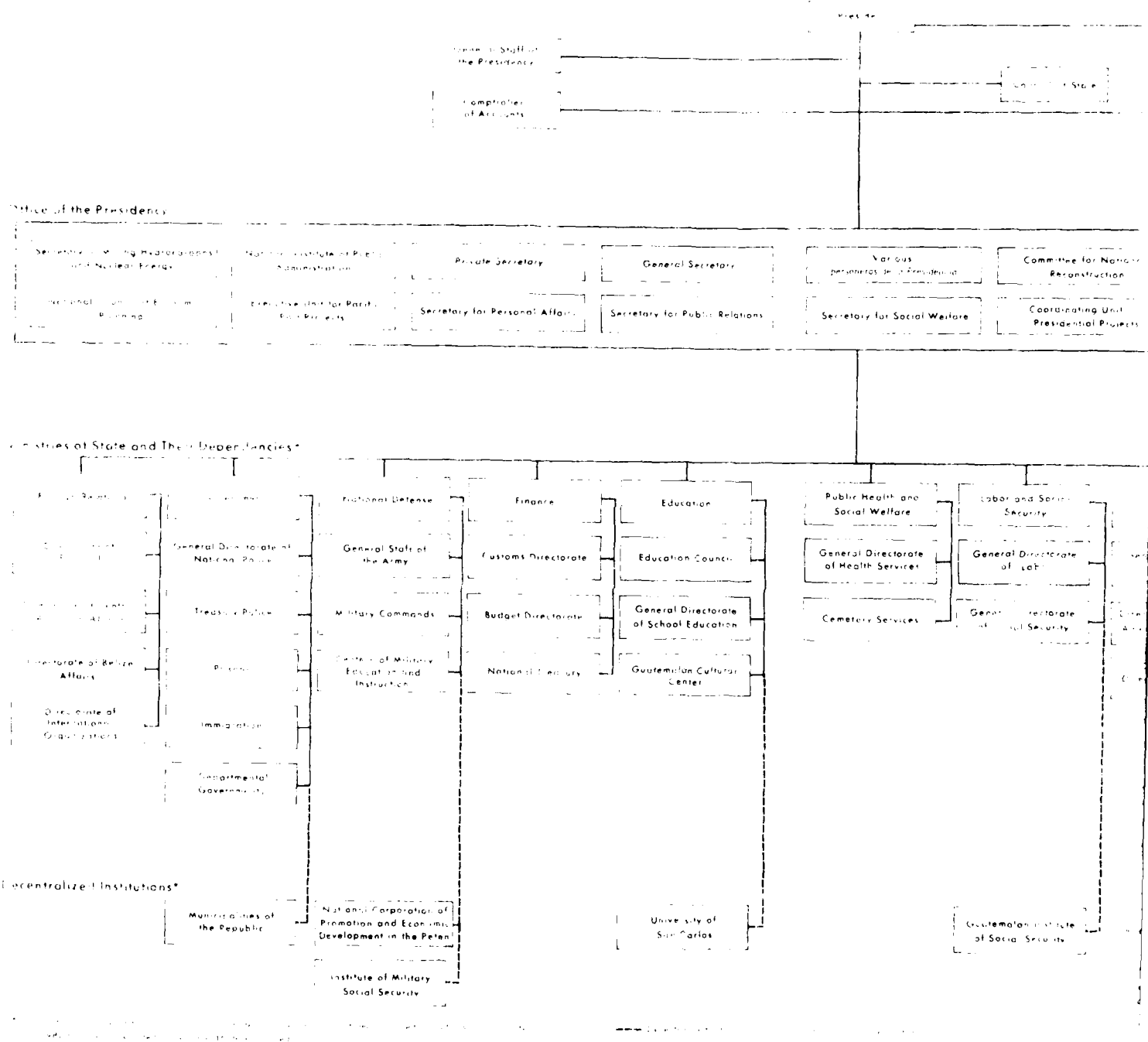
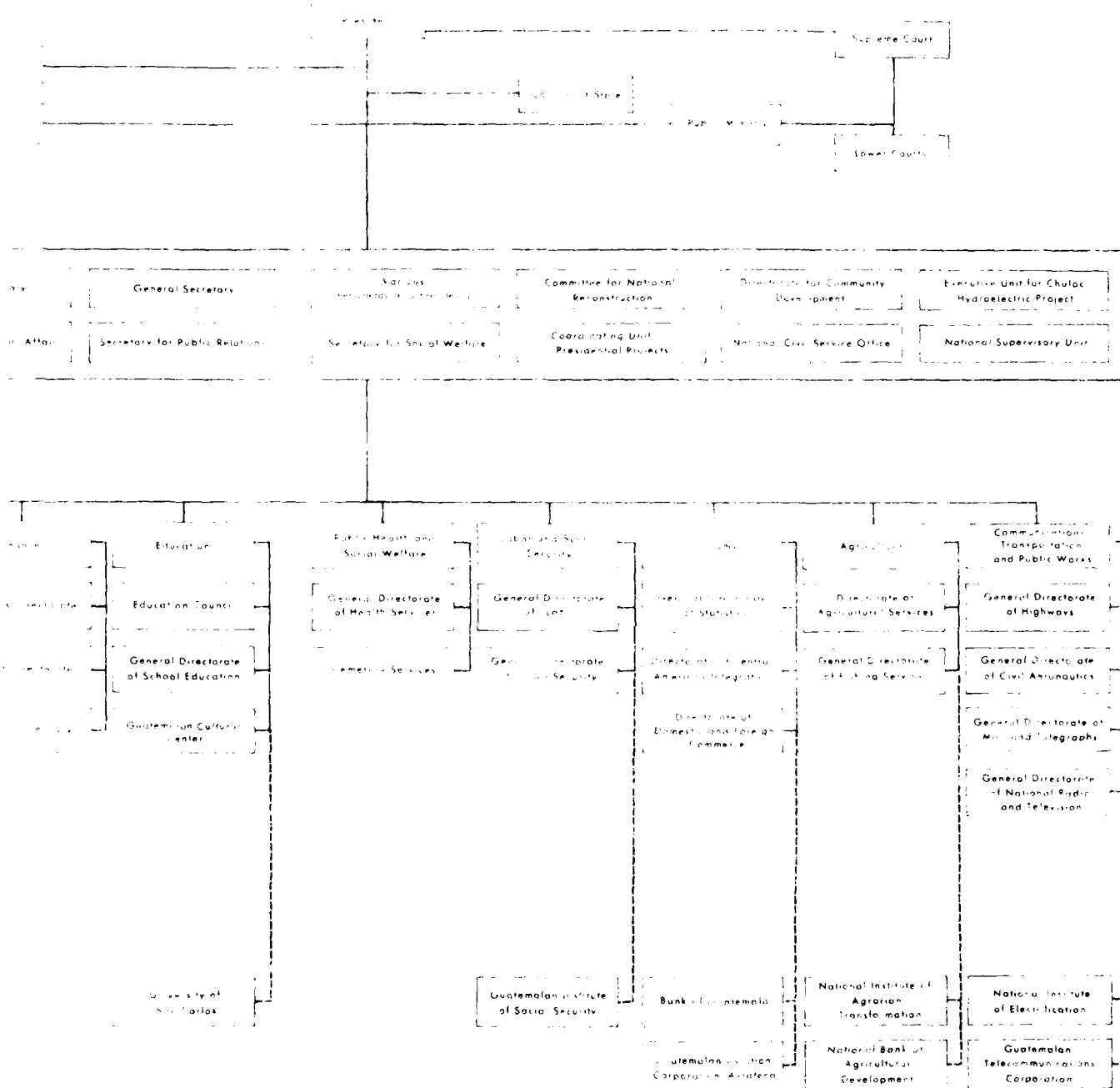


Figure 5. Administrative Organization of Government, January 1983

# Government and Politics



and the National Police, respectively. In early 1983 these two ministers, as well as the minister of communications, transportation, and public works, were military officers; the other seven ministries were headed by civilians. At least two members of Ríos Montt's initial cabinet were nominated by private interest associations: the ministers of economy and agriculture were nominated, respectively, by industrial and agricultural interest associations (see *The Private Sector*, this ch.). During his first year in power, Ríos Montt's cabinet was quite stable. Although he asked for the resignation of the entire cabinet in December 1982, only one position, that of minister of education, subsequently changed hands. Each ministry also had at least one vice minister and a chief officer (*oficialia mayor*), who worked directly under the minister of state.

The advisory body to the executive known as the Council of State was not new, although the Council of State created by decree on September 15, 1982, was a markedly different body from that mandated in the 1965 constitution. The previous body had consisted of 15 full members and 15 alternates, representatives of both governmental organs and nongovernmental interest associations who met as a consultative body. Like its predecessor, the Council of State decreed by the Ríos Montt government was advisory and nondeliberative, but its size was doubled to 30 full members and 30 alternates (all 60 of whom functioned as active members), and the representation of governmental bodies was markedly reduced. Of the 30 full members, 10 represented various Indian groups, and one representative each was given to the national University of San Carlos, private universities, chambers of commerce and of industry, agricultural interests, bankers, professional associations, the press, cooperatives, women's associations, urban workers, agricultural workers, a political party, municipal governments, the judiciary, and two from the executive branch of government. The last three full members acted as administrators of the Council of State—as its president, vice president, and general secretary. The new council's initial president was Jorge Antonio Serrano Elías, an evangelical Christian and relatively liberal politician.

Some of the members were chosen by the sectors they represented, others were appointed by the executive. The press associations, for example, declined to name representatives, so the president did so in their behalf. Although five political parties were asked to name representatives, only one—the United Front of the Revolution (Frente Unido de la Revolución—FUR)—did so. The other four parties, which together had formed a multiparty front, declined their seats, claiming it was unfair to be given less than 15 percent of the seats when together they had received some 80 percent of the votes in the recently aborted elections. Their seats remained vacant in early 1983.

All members were active on one of three committees—for political, economic, and human rights matters—that were initially formed in 1982. The only function of the Council of State before March 1983 was the writing of three laws governing electoral registration, the formation of an electoral tribunal and constituent assembly elections, and political

party organization. All were promulgated on March 23, the first anniversary of the coup, after review and revision in the president's office. The function of the Council of State after that date remained unclear. Council members complained of this limited and uncertain mandate—at one point a mass resignation was threatened—and also complained of the lack of communication between the council and executive officials in the National Palace. Outside observers noted, however, that communication took place through the council's president, Serrano.

Two other small but important offices were technically independent of the executive branch of government, but this independence was belied by the fact that their chief operatives were appointed and could be dismissed by the president of the republic. The comptroller of accounts—formerly elected by Congress for a four-year term but appointed for an unspecified term under the Fundamental Statute—holds ultimate control over governmental revenues and expenditures, including those of local governments and decentralized government institutions. The Public Ministry, headed by the attorney general, functions to represent the state and defend its rights and interests both in and out of court, to enforce compliance with the laws and the execution of judicial decisions, and to represent and defend persons without legal counsel.

### **Legislature**

Ríos Montt dismissed Congress on March 23, 1982, and ruled during the next year by decree. During that year a number of unspecific *pronouncements* indicated that a constituent assembly, to be elected in the future, would not act as a legislature but would function to write a new constitution that would, it was presumed, mandate a popularly elected legislative body. Until that time the executive would continue to legislate by decree.

The Congress had been dismissed during the dictatorship of Peralta Azurdia. Subsequent governments operated with elected unicameral legislatures. No post-1954 Congress has had much real power; rarely was that body more than a rubber stamp for executive decisions. In reality, its primary function was to serve as a forum of discussion among the various political parties. The size of the Congress—each of whose members represented a population of some 100,000 in their electoral districts—increased gradually with population growth. The Congress that was dismissed in 1982 had 61 members.

### **Judiciary**

Under the Fundamental Statute the judiciary is statutorily and financially independent of the executive branch. This independence is tempered, however, by the fact that the Supreme Court justices are named by the president and may be removed by him, and most lower court justices are chosen by the president from lists prepared by the appointed members of the Supreme Court. Under the 1965 constitution these judges had been selected by Congress. Some observers noted that although the judiciary under Lucas García had been more

independent in a strict legal sense, judges had frequently been subjected to intimidation; even a Supreme Court judge had been assassinated. Ríos Montt pledged, however, not to interfere in the legal process. Critics pointed to a need, nevertheless, for substantial reform before the judiciary would be truly independent and effective for all citizens.

The Supreme Court, whose president (Ricardo Sagastume Vidaurre in early 1983) also acts as the president of the judiciary, consists of at least nine justices who meet in separate civil and criminal chambers. It acts as the highest court of appeals and makes recommendations on legal and procedural reform of the judiciary. A separate 12-member court of constitutionality, mandated in the 1965 constitution to rule on the constitutionality of laws, was abolished by Ríos Montt.

Lower courts included the Court of Appeals, courts of second and first instance (some of which have ordinary and others, special jurisdiction), and local magistrate courts (justices of the peace) with jurisdiction over petty crimes. These latter courts are found in each municipality (*municipio*) and are presided over by the local mayor (*alcalde*).

Two special courts also remained unchanged from their mandates in the 1965 constitution. The Contentious-Administrative Court heard cases involving disputes arising from acts by government officials at any level in the performance of their duties. The Court of Conflicts of Jurisdiction settled disputes between any court and the public administration and resolved jurisdictional disputes among courts. A third special court, the Special Court of Amparo, which heard suits by citizens against any organ of government in cases involving breach of political or constitutional rights, was abolished by Ríos Montt.

By Decree Law Number 46-82 of July 1, 1982 Ríos Montt created another kind of court, called simply courts with special jurisdiction, which were an integral part of the Ministry of National Defense and not under the judicial branch of government. These highly controversial courts consisted individually of three members, either lawyers or army officers, named by the president; their personnel and their proceedings were entirely in camera, that is, secret. They were empowered to sentence those whom they convicted of political crimes, certain crimes of violence, and other heinous crimes, to up to 30 years in prison or to execution by firing squad (see Crime and Punishment, ch. 5). After widespread outcry over a number of executions carried out without benefit of appeals procedures, the regime in late 1982 granted the Supreme Court the right to review the convictions of the courts of special jurisdiction. Executions continued, nevertheless, amid continued protests. In early 1983 it was not publicly known how many such courts existed.

### **Local Government**

The Republic of Guatemala was administrative<sup>1</sup> divided into 22 departments, and those, in turn, were apportioned to 324 municipalities. Belize was officially considered the twenty-third department.

which added six additional municipalities for a total of 330 (see Latin America, this ch.). Departmental governments have never been more than administrative subdivisions of the central government. In 1983 governors continued, as in the past, to be appointed by the president, and the departments had no independent sources of revenues.

Municipalities were a different matter. Historically, municipal governments have been legally autonomous from the central government, and their most important officials were elected locally in periodic, hotly contested popular elections. This autonomy was always tempered, however, by the generally inadequate power of taxation of local authorities, which often left municipalities dependent on the central government for the provision of certain basic services, and also by the authority of the local military commissioner (a civilian representative of the army located in every municipality) who, during the increasingly frequent periods when the nation was ruled under a state of siege, automatically supplanted the elected local mayor as the chief local official.

Under the normal rule of law, however, the mayor was given sweeping powers. In addition to executive authority, he also acted as the local magistrate (justice of the peace), and as the ex officio chairman of the municipal council, he also held legislative competence. The municipal council consisted of varying numbers of councillors (*regidores*), who debated mayoral decisions. Made up of representatives of all the candidates for mayor, the municipal councils often had members from a wide variety of political parties and interests and were thus extremely political bodies. Appointed officials included *síndicos*, who acted as secretaries and legal recorders, and local police (*policía* or *alguaciles*), who functioned in a minor capacity. Real police authority lay with a small contingent of national policemen found in every municipal center (see Law Enforcement, ch. 5).

Ladinos (see Glossary) have traditionally monopolized local governmental posts, although since the 1960s Indians have become active in local politics in numerous Highland municipalities, where they are an overwhelming majority. This gradual integration of Indians into political life has hastened the decline of the civil-religious hierarchy of the Maya, whereby Indian localities have traditionally functioned within a political hierarchy, headed by elders known as *principales*, separate from the local ladino government (see Indigenous Belief Systems, ch. 2).

Municipal government underwent a vast change during the first year of the Río Montt regime. All elected mayors and previously appointed governors were replaced by government appointees. (A considerable number of the new appointees were reported to be military officers and evangelical Christians.) Municipal councils were also dismissed, making central government authority in the municipalities complete. Under the state of siege, municipal authorities in areas of combat became subordinate to local military commanders. Central government officials insisted, however, that this state of affairs was only temporary.

and that the long-standing tradition of local autonomy would be restored in the future.

Two other changes were under way in early 1983; one was merely administrative, but the other had the potential for vast future changes. First, the *Fundamental Statute* called for the creation of a Central District out of 12 municipalities in the department of Guatemala that included the capital city. Presumably, this was designed to improve governmental administration in the rapidly growing metropolis of Guatemala City. Second, the central government, through the *personero* for community development projects and other offices within the Office of the Presidency, was experimenting in the municipality of Nebaj, Quiché, with a "model communities program" that some analysts saw as a prototype for a new system of local government. In this program, which was an integral part of the government's counterinsurgency program, a local committee with corporatist-style representation from various community interests was set up with functions that paralleled those of the municipal government. In early 1983 it was too soon to know whether this experiment would be a success, whether it would become more widespread, or what it implied for the future of local government.

## **Civilian Political Actors**

### **The Private Sector**

Traditionally, the Guatemalan political system has functioned to the benefit of a tiny landed elite. Since World War II diversification in the source of wealth and the rise of the prominence of the military institution in the political arena have profoundly altered this traditional system. The private sector elite was still a prime beneficiary of the political system in the 1950s, but it was no longer a homogeneous group and, in addition to intra-elite competition, the private sector business elite had to vie for the fruits of political power with other sectors of society. At the center of the private sector was a small group whose members held considerable portions of the nation's commercial, agricultural, industrial, and financial assets. This oligarchy neither spoke with one voice nor retained the monopoly on political power of the pre-World War II landed elite, but it did influence the political process to an extent far out of proportion to its size, if not its wealth (see *Social Organization*, ch. 2).

The most important vehicles of political influence used by the private sector were found in a large number of interest-group associations of widely varying size and importance. The origins of these interest associations go back to the late 1940s, when government measures instituted by President Arévalo to stimulate domestic economic activity led private sector interests to organize in order to take advantage of new government incentives. These new associations suddenly became defensive organizations under President Arbenz, who proved to be far less favorable toward business sectors than his predecessor had been. The associations did not play a major role during the period of the

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

revolution, however. It was later, during the governments of Ydígoras and Peralta Azurdia, that private sector organizations really blossomed on the political scene. One study indicates that what had been a handful of business associations increased at the rate of four annually under Ydígoras and 10 annually under Peralta.

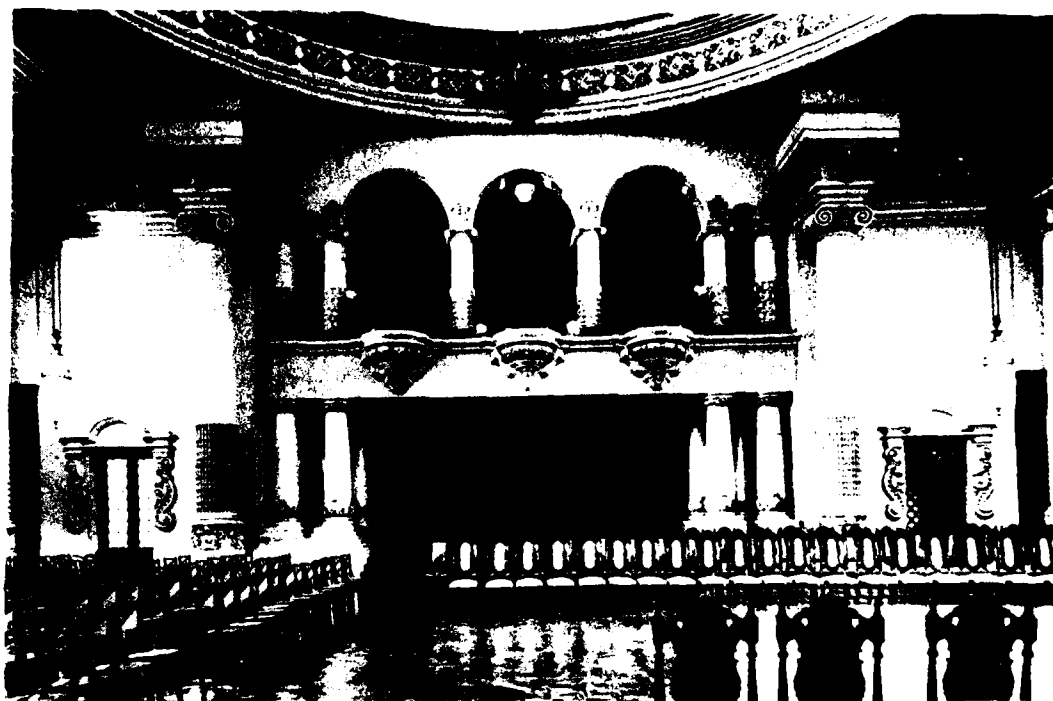
The organization that remained the most important voice of the private sector in the early 1980s, the Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations (Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras—CACIF), was founded in 1957. Designed as an umbrella organization for smaller private sector interest organizations, CACIF's original members were the nation's two long-standing organizations, the Guatemalan Agricultural Association (Asociación Guatemalteca de Agricultura—AGA) and the Chambers of Industry and Commerce (Cámaras de Industria y Comercio—CIC). Much of the growth of private sector organizations during the late 1950s and early 1960s was accomplished under the aegis of CACIF. By the early 1980s CACIF was the largest organization of private sector interests in Central America.

The size of CACIF gave it considerable influence over government policies concerning business. By the 1980s, for example, it had become standard for new presidents to ask CACIF to name the minister of economy and other important government officials with control over economic policies. But the size of CACIF was also its weakness, for its various member organizations did not always share the same interests. Often, for example, a policy promoted by a group of manufacturers of goods for domestic consumption would be bitterly opposed by another organization of exporting interests. Member organizations of CACIF, therefore, often operated independent of the umbrella organization when it came to specific matters of policy.

Another highly influential organization was the National Coffee Association (Asociación Nacional de Café—ANACAFE), whose power stemmed from the primary role of coffee as a source of foreign exchange and of government revenues from export taxes. AGA and the newer Cámara de Agro were the most important groups representing landed agricultural interests in general. Growers of cotton and sugarcane were also well organized. The major organization of industrialists was known as the General Association of Industrialists (Asociación General de Industriales), which consisted of over 50 smaller organizations. Banking and commercial interests had their own organizations. Representatives of the 200-odd United States-based firms operating in Guatemala even had their own organization, the North American Chamber of Commerce (Cámara Norteamericana de Comerciantes).

Two other organizations in the business community worthy of note were the Friends of the Country (Amigos del País) and Guatemalan Freedom Foundation. Both were conservative (the latter extremely so), and both had as a major concern the promotion, at home and abroad, of the image of Guatemala as a good place to do business.





*Part of the Reception Hall, National Palace, Guatemala City  
Courtesy Organization of American States*

Although the power of such organizations has, indeed, had the effect of making Guatemala free of many taxes and regulations on business, the private sector has not, by any means, had it all its own way. The growing encroachment of the army in the economic sphere during the 1970s had a chilling effect on the business community. Taken together with disagreements over taxation and other economic policies and the declining image of Guatemala because of its poor human rights record, relations between the government and the private sector were at a low ebb by the end of the Lucas García presidency. This became expressed in capital flight and, finally, in the participation of some private sector interests in the plotting that led to Lucas García's overthrow.

Business interests were initially pleased with Ríos Montt, and CA-CIF leaders nominated the minister of agriculture as well as the minister of economy. During the following year, however, relations between the new government and the private sector soured once again. Elections in which private sector interests hoped to gain considerable power were postponed, a new minister of agriculture was named, and taxes and austerity measures unfavorable to business were undertaken to counter a growing economic crisis. At times the new president assumed a populist stance that made business interests doubt that future policies

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

would be made in their favor. At one meeting with business leaders, Ríos Montt chided them for their profiteering and for their lack of patriotism by engaging in capital flight operations; at another, he declared that "in this country there are only exploiters and exploited" and went on to criticize the greed of the private sector.

Nevertheless, after the army, the private sector remained the best organized and most powerful political interest in the country. This was in spite of its widely perceived inability to unite into a single voice. A number of factors led to this intra-elite rivalry, including diversification of the economic base, personal rivalries, competition from the army, and the economic recession that began in the late 1970s. Some analysts saw this inability of the members of the elite to resolve their differences as the key to understanding the disintegration of the political situation into violent discord.

#### **Religious Institutions**

The power of religious institutions has long been a bone of political contention in Guatemala. Until the 1970s the sole object of that contention was the Roman Catholic Church, whose priests had accompanied the conquistadores and held a near monopoly on organized religion ever since. Protestant missionaries began arriving in Guatemala after World War II, however, and in even larger numbers after the earthquake of 1976. By 1982 Protestants claimed a following of over 20 percent of the population, and their number and political influence grew dramatically when Ríos Montt, a born-again follower of the hitherto obscure evangelical Church of the Word, became president. Religious competition between Catholics and Protestants with political overtones grew during the subsequent year (see Protestantism, ch. 2).

The major political competition of the nineteenth century had been between the proclerical Conservatives and the anticlerical Liberals. The power of the church, due to a large extent to its extensive landholdings, had been enormous throughout the colonial period, but in 1871 the Liberals gained a definitive victory, and the presidency of Justo Rufino Barrios (1873-85) began a long period of decline in church influence. The church lost its tax-exempt status, its right to hold title to lands, and had part of its properties seized by the government.

Church-state relations reached another low point during the early 1950s, and a strongly anticommunist pastoral letter from the conservative Archbishop Mariano Rossell y Arellano in early 1954 did much to galvanize opposition to President Arbenz. The counterrevolution was a boon to the church hierarchy, and succeeding governments rewarded the church handsomely for its frequent gestures of support. The church's pre-1871 privileges were restored in the 1956 constitution and, in addition, permission was granted to teach religion in the public schools. The 1965 constitution went further, declaring that religious instruction was in the national interest. The 1982 Fundamental Statute states that although religious instruction is optional, the state will contribute to the support of religious education in the schools.

Gains in the church's legal status were offset by other factors, however. Although the new conservative archbishop, Cardinal Mario Casariego, maintained close relations with each succeeding government, his failure to protest widely perceived social injustices and the increasingly violent nature of political rule led to the gradual disaffection of many Catholic clergy who themselves became the targets of violence in the 1970s and early 1980s. Ten or more clergy and scores of lay workers were killed during this time. Increasingly, bishops spoke out when the cardinal remained silent; in 1979 seven bishops threatened to resign. The following year the bishop of the department of Quiché fled, taking all clergy and nuns with him, after repeated death threats. Many others fled as well, and by 1982 there were only some 200 Catholic clergy left in the entire country. Among those whose protests of violence had been answered with death threats was the brother of the future president, Bishop Mario Ríos Montt of the department of Escuintla.

Missionary relief work in the wake of the 1976 earthquake had sparked a significant increase in the number of Protestant clergy. They were also the occasional victims of rural violence, but nowhere to the extent of the Catholic clergy. The army was much less prone to associate the Protestants—who by and large were conservative evangelical fundamentalists who engaged in little activity that threatened the established social order—with the leftist opposition. A significant number of the Roman Catholic clergy, however, had become active in organizing their congregations in order to press local and national authorities for social change to benefit the poor. Suspicions by army officers that such activities were subversive were reinforced when a handful of priests did, in fact, join the growing guerrilla movement in the western Highlands. Evangelical Protestantism, by way of its promotion of the rewards of the hereafter and its atomistic structure that did not promote social organization, proved to be less threatening to army personnel in a situation where it was increasingly important to be able to distinguish friends from enemies. It was reported in 1982 that over 100 different fundamentalist denominations had approximately 6,800 congregations and temples nationwide. "Mainstream" Protestant denominations played only a minor role in this growth; the vast majority of the new converts joined small fundamentalist sects with links to United States-based missionary organizations. The Mormons were said to be the fastest growing single sect in Guatemala.

President Ríos Montt had converted from Catholicism to evangelical Protestantism in 1979. In its human rights report for 1982, the United States Department of State declared that "adherence to a particular faith confers no advantage or disadvantage" on Guatemalans. Indeed, Ríos Montt invited priests and religious workers who had been driven out of the country by violence to return, and by early 1983 a number had done so. Violence against Catholic priests and layworkers dropped markedly, although it did not end. Nevertheless, many Guatemalans pointed to the surge in growth of the evangelical sects during late 1982

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

and early 1983 as evidence to question the Department of State claim. Even if religious favoritism was not practiced under Ríos Montt, they argued, many Guatemalans perceived that under his government there were advantages to be gained by being an evangelical Protestant and, therefore, the evangelical sects took advantage of having "one of their own" in the National Palace.

This perception came largely from the president's radio and television addresses to the nation every Sunday, in which reference was commonly made to his religious beliefs. It also came from the significant role of evangelical Christians, particularly from the president's own Church of the Word, in various aspects of government. Two elders of his church were among his closest advisers in the Office of the Presidency, and the head elder of the Church of the Word, Jim Degolyer, acted as Ríos Montt's "spiritual adviser," counseling him on Biblical teachings concerning the operation of governments. Evangelicals from other sects held at least two other important governmental posts (see Executive, this ch.).

One of these, Harris Whitbeck, was in charge of the "model communities program" that was part of the counterinsurgency effort in the Highlands. Relief efforts in these areas were assisted by a variety of evangelical organizations, including the Foundation for Aid to the Indian People of the Church of the Word. Also contributing to these efforts were numerous United States-based evangelical organizations, including the Christian Broadcast Network of Pat Robertson and Jerry Falwell's Moral Majority. Early in his presidency Ríos Montt had expressed hopes of receiving US\$1 billion in aid from such organizations. After a year in office such expectations had not been borne out, but aid was nevertheless considerable. The largest single effort, in January 1983, brought US\$1 million worth of grain, clothes, and medicine and 350 missionaries from the International Love Lift program of Gospel Outreach, a California-based missionary organization that had founded the Church of the Word in 1976.

The March 1983 visit of Pope John Paul II highlighted the contrasting strain in relations between the government and the Catholic church. The execution of six persons on the eve of the pope's arrival, despite pleas for clemency by the Vatican, led to several expressions of the pope's "grief" and "dismay" at the government's action. John Paul's criticisms were clear: the most enthusiastic public response to his homily in Guatemala City came when he said, "when man is downtrodden, when rights are violated, when flagrant injustices are committed, when he is submitted to tortures, done violence to by abductions, or one violates his right to life, one commits a crime and a very grave offense against God."

Such public statements were balanced by the pope's private admonitions to Guatemalan clergy to shun a role of political leadership. Nevertheless, there remained a growing sense of religious competition in Guatemala, and it was quite clear where each brand of Christianity stood vis-à-vis the government in 1983. Bishop Ríos Montt, who was

asked to leave the country in late 1982 for reasons that were not made clear, expressed the worst fears of many Guatemalans when he speculated that if people's religious sentiments were manipulated, "it could well turn into a religious war more serious than our political war."

### **Popular Organizations**

Popular organizations—of trade unionists, peasants, students, and professionals—became widespread and flourished between 1944 and 1954, but since that time they have periodically been violently repressed by the government and, as a result, have lost the political impact they had during the decade of the revolution. After a period of brutal repression during the regime of President Arana Osorio, his successor displayed a marked tolerance of popular organizations, and they experienced an upsurge in activity between 1974 and 1976. President Laugerud's tolerance ended, however, with the February 1976 earthquake, and the subsequent years witnessed ever-increasing levels of confrontation between the government and the popular organizations. By the early 1980s virtually their entire leadership and many members were either dead, in exile, or operating clandestinely in antigovernment political and guerrilla organizations. After the March coup Ríos Montt indicated that he would tolerate such organizations, and there has been some public activity during his presidency. The state of siege, however, made union activity illegal, and public activity ceased until the siege was lifted in March 1983. As of mid-1983 the government's attitude was unclear. Distrust was widespread, however; important government officials *openly opined that any popular organization was a guerrilla front*, while the leaders of clandestine popular organizations suspected that any gesture by the government to allow public activity by popular organizations was an invitation to be murdered.

Organized labor first appeared in Guatemala during the 1920s, largely under communist inspiration and leadership. Gains made during the decade were wiped out during the dictatorship of Jorge Ubico from 1931 to 1944. From 1944 to 1954 the formation of trade unions was actively encouraged by the government, and during the Arbenz regime rural peasant unions were formed for the first time. The legal basis for this activity was the 1947 Labor Code which, albeit highly modified, remained on the books in 1983. The code was liberal for its day, but by no means revolutionary. It provided for minimum wages, social security, eight-hour workdays and holidays, protection against arbitrary dismissals, individual and collective bargaining, and official union recognition. By 1954 the General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers (Confederación General de Trabajadores Guatemaltecos—CGTG), the national confederation of urban workers, claimed 500 affiliated unions with 104,000 members; the rural confederation, the National Confederation of Guatemalan Peasants (Confederación Nacional de Campesinos Guatemaltecos—CNCG), was estimated to have 250,000 members in 1,700 affiliated bodies.

After the 1954 coup d'état the CGTG and the CNCG had their legal registration canceled; most trade unions, particularly peasant unions, were declared illegal, and a number of their most militant leaders were executed. By 1955 there were 23 legally recognized unions, two of which were rural, with a total membership of fewer than 27,000. Periodic relaxation and repression of union activities left union membership at approximately the same level in 1973. One method of government control during this period was through the encouragement of a less militant labor organization, the Confederation of Federated Workers (Confederación des Trabajadores Federados—CTF), which became affiliated with the American Institute for Free Labor Development (AIFLD) of the American Federation of Labor and Congress of Industrial Organizations (AFL-CIO). By the mid-1970s it was Guatemala's largest trade union federation and, although it expressed its support for the Langerud government before 1976, it was violently repressed after 1976 and retreated from any political stance (see table A).

The primary targets of the government repression from 1976 onward, however, were the National Confederation of Workers (Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores—CNT), which had originally been founded by the Christian Democrats (Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca—DCCG) but had broken that affiliation in favor of the leftist Latin American Labor Confederation, and the Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala (Federación Autónoma Sindical de Guatemala—FASGUA), linked to the outlawed Guatemalan communist party, the Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo—PGT). The onset of the new round of repression coincided with the formation by these two organizations and federations of bank workers, sugar workers, municipal workers, and teachers into the umbrella National Committee for Trade Union Unity (Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical—CNUS) in April 1976. At their first major public appearance on May 1, CNUS leaders urged the government to provide swift and adequate relief to earthquake victims and also demanded the right to work, the payment of minimum wages, quicker procedures for the legalization of union organizations, and a new labor code. Instead, they were met with a stepped-up campaign of repression.

Strike activity was also increasingly met by violence. A general strike called by CNUS in October 1978 to protest bus fare increases left 31 dead and 400 wounded. The entire 27-member executive committee of the CNT was killed in 1979 in the middle of a four-year effort to unionize the Coca-Cola bottling facility, Embotelladora Guatemalteca. These and scores of other union officials simply "disappeared" between 1976 and 1980, never to be heard from again. Others were arrested and urged to leave the country. Still others became radicalized, disappeared from public view and, presumably, joined clandestine opposition groups or guerrilla organizations. Without leadership, the CNUS was impotent by the early 1980s. In May 1983 a new labor confederation

was launched--the Guatemalan Confederation of Trade Union Unity (Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala--CUSC).

Rural labor unions of peasants were virtually nonexistent after 1954. An organizational structure was maintained, however, within the co-operative movement, which was never crushed, and through a small number of peasant leagues that survived. Increasing population pressures on limited lands and the disarray concerning land titles led to a rise in land seizures, both by organized peasants and by those taking advantage of the confusion of title claims to force peasants off long-held properties (see *Rural-Urban Variation*, ch. 2). The Langerud government at first encouraged the cooperative movement and, at the same time, initiated land development projects in the north of Guatemala, but rural strife over landholdings increased markedly during the latter part of the Langerud regime. This strife culminated in May 1978 in Panzós, Alta Verapaz, with the massacre of some 100 peasants who had gathered to protest that their titles were not being recognized.

The Panzós Massacre was followed by two incidents involving land disputes that resulted in appallingly bloody violence. The first, in October 1979, involved a group of peasants who occupied a church in the capital to protest the arrest of nine of their fellow villagers who had been protesting the seizure of their land. The rector called the police, who beat and arrested all the peasants. The peasants' leader and their lawyer were later found murdered. In January 1980, after a week of futile protests over land seizures, another group of 30 peasants from Quiché seized the Spanish embassy in an effort to be heard. Despite the pleas of the Spanish ambassador, riot police stormed the embassy on the same day, a fire broke out under mysterious circumstances, and 39 people were burned to death. Spain severed diplomatic relations, which as of mid-1983 had not been restored. In 1979 the Committee of Peasant Unity (Comité de Unidad Campesina--CUC) was organized clandestinely, because rural labor unions were still illegal, to address such problems and to organize workers on large plantations along the Pacific coast. It quickly proved successful, for in 1979 a strike among sugarcane workers and in 1980 a strike among coffee and cotton pickers forced the government to raise the minimum wage from the equivalent of US\$1.19 a day to US\$3.20 a day. The success was tempered, however, by the deaths of over 100 strikers and by the fact that many plantation owners simply ignored the new law. Subsequent efforts of the CUC were directed toward urging the enforcement of the new minimum wage legislation and cooperation with insurgent groups.

Students and professors, especially those at the University of San Carlos in Guatemala City, were often in the forefront of the political activity of the popular organizations. Student organizations, particularly the Association of University Students (Asociación de Estudiantes Universitarios--AEU), have traditionally thought of themselves as support groups for peasants and workers in their struggles against the government. Their major weapons were public demonstrations and

Table A. Political Parties and Selected Interest Groups, 1983

<b>Political Parties</b>	
MLN .....	Movimiento de Liberación Nacional (National Liberation Movement)
CAN .....	Central Auténtica Nacionalista (Authentic Nationalist Center)
PID .....	Partido Institucional Democrático (Institutional Democratic Party)
PR .....	Partido Revolucionario (Revolutionary Party)
DCG .....	Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca (Guatemalan Christian Democracy)
FUR .....	Frente Unido de la Revolución (United Front of the Revolution)
PNR .....	Partido Nacional Renovador (National Renovation Party)
FUN .....	Frente de Unidad Nacional (National Unity Front)
PSD .....	Partido Socialista Democrática (Socialist Democratic Party)
PGT .....	Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo (Guatemalan Labor Party)
<b>Private Sector Organizations</b>	
CACIF .....	Comité Coordinador de Asociaciones Agrícolas, Comerciales, Industriales, y Financieras (Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial, and Financial Associations)
AGA .....	Asociación Guatemalteca de Agricultura (Guatemalan Agricultural Association)
ANACAFE .....	Asociación Nacional de Café (National Coffee Association)

student strikes, which throughout the 1960s and 1970s were often violently crushed. During the height of the violence of the late 1970s, as strikes escalated, students became a favorite target of the death squad known as the Secret Anticommunist Army (Ejército Secreto Anticomunista—ESA). Starting in 1978, one AEU president after another was assassinated or simply “disappeared.” The worst of the violence against the university came in 1980, when several hundred professors and students were reportedly killed. In response, an army intelligence officer was publicly burned to death in front of the university’s main gate. Then a bus stop at the university was sprayed with machine-gun bullets, leaving five dead and 11 wounded. By the end of the year the university rector had fled into exile, and San Carlos was practically closed. Many students, like their peasant and trade union counterparts, subsequently went into clandestine activity.

After the coup of March 1982, open political activity by students on behalf of the disappeared surfaced briefly. After the imposition of the state of siege, however, no public political activity was permitted, and



**Labor Organizations**

CIF .....	Confederación de Trabajadores Federados (Confederation of Federated Workers)
CNT .....	Confederación Nacional de Trabajadores (National Confederation of Workers)
FASGUA .....	Federación Autónoma Sindical de Guatemala (Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala)
CNUS .....	Comité Nacional de Unidad Sindical (National Committee for Trade Union Unity)
CUC .....	Comité de Unidad Campesina (Committee of Peasant Unity)
CUSG .....	Confederación de Unidad Sindical de Guatemala (Guatemalan Confederation of Trade Union Unity)

**Opposition and Insurgent Organizations**

FDCR .....	Frente Democrático Contra La Represión (Democratic Front Against Repression)
FP-31 .....	Frente Popular 31 de Enero (31st of January Popular Front)
CGUP .....	Comité Guatemalteco de Unidad Patriótica (Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity)
URNG .....	Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca (Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity)
EGP .....	Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres (Guerrilla Army of the Poor)
ORPA .....	Organización del Pueblo en Armas (Organization of People in Arms)
FAR .....	Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes (Rebel Armed Forces)
PGT-Núcleo .....	Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo-Núcleo (Guatemalan Labor Party-Nucleus)

several dozen students were abducted by government agents during the last half of the year.

Organizations of middle-class professionals have never been strong in Guatemala. Some of the more influential groups have been those of the journalists, who have a number of professional associations, the most important of which is the Guatemalan Journalists' Association (Asociación de Periodistas de Guatemala--APG). As their members became victimized by the violence (12 journalists were killed in 1980, more than that in 1981, during the Lucas García regime, and as their profession became restricted by censorship legislation and warnings by officials of the Ríos Montt regime, the APG came to act as a kind of self-protection society that, at times, was necessarily political in nature. In February 1983 the APG president issued a public statement in which he said that the reporter who praises the authorities "receives the mark of approval, but he who criticizes, suggests errors or shrouded realities is shunned, and subject to censorship and severe chastisement by those displeased by the information."

While censorship has been official during periods of state of siege, intimidation and murder have prompted journalists to practice self-censorship at all times. They were subject to violence by the left as well as the right: one prominent conservative journalist was murdered in 1981, another kidnapped by the PCJ in 1982. Guatemala's five daily newspapers, *La Hora*, *El Gráfico*, *El Imparcial*, *Prensa Libre*, and *La Razón*, ranged from politically moderate to conservative. Perhaps the boldest and most influential was *El Gráfico*, which had a circulation of some 60,000 in the early 1980s.

Persons in the teaching and legal professions were also particularly subject to the violence of the late 1970s and early 1980s. The Guatemalan Bar Association was ineffective in preventing violence against both lawyers and judges, and Amnesty International reported that 58 members of the legal profession were killed between January 1980 and June 1981. Law professors, legal advisers for trade unions, and judges of politically sensitive cases were particular targets of attacks. Elementary and secondary-school teachers who engaged in union and strike activities were also targeted; in 1980 an estimated 326 were killed.

In February 1979, a former Christian Democratic congressman named Carlos Gallardo formed an organization called the Democratic Front Against Repression (Frente Democrático Contra la Represión—FDOR). Soon it could claim the membership of some 150 organizations of students, professionals, peasants, workers, and political parties. The purpose of the FDOR was to publicize and protest the violence; it held no political program outside these goals. During its first four years, all its activities were clandestine. In mid-1982 the Ríos Montt regime made a tentative gesture toward opening a dialogue, but by early 1983 this had not come about.

### **Insurgents**

During the early 1980s popular organizations faded into insurgent groups, crossing the fine line between them. Two organizations founded in the early 1980s, the 31st of January Popular Front (Frente Popular 31 de Enero—FP-31) and the Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity (Comité Guatemalteco de Unidad Patriótica—CGUP), labeled themselves popular or mass organizations, but both were clearly revolutionary in intent and, if they were not guerrilla-front organizations, they prominently expressed their solidarity with the guerrilla insurgents.

The FP-31, organized in 1981 and named to commemorate the 1980 Spanish embassy fire, was an umbrella organization for six groups representing peasants, workers, students, slum dwellers, and the Christian left. The peasant organization, CUC, came under the wing of the FP-31 and was its most important component. Its other five members were the Nucleus of Revolutionary Workers (Núcleo Obreros Revolucionarios—NOR), the Robín García Revolutionary University Students' Front (Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario—Robín García Universidad—FERGU), the Robín García Revolutionary Secondary



*Bank of Guatemala, which features "modernized" Mayan designs*

### *Guatemala. A Country Study*

Students' Front (Frente Estudiantil Revolucionario "Robin García" Secundaria—FERG-S); the Poor People's Coordinator (Coordinadora de Pobladores—CDP); and the Revolutionary Christians (Cristianos Revolucionarios—CR). In addition to recruitment and propaganda activities, the FP-31 undertook sabotage and other actions designed to weaken the government. In May 1982 the CUC and other members of the FP-31 occupied the Brazilian embassy in Guatemala. In contrast to the 1980 tragedy, however, the two day occupation, designed to bring attention to massacres taking place in rural areas, ended peacefully after two days, and the perpetrators were flown to exile in Mexico.

The CGUP was established in February 1982 by 26 leading Guatemalan exiles. Its membership, said to have grown to over 50 several months later, consisted of trade unionists, politicians, intellectuals, and human rights activists who were presided over by Luis Cardozo y Aragón, a well-known writer and veteran of the Arbenz government. The CGUP expressed solidarity with the guerrilla struggle and saw itself in a similar role to The Twelve (Los Doce), a group of intellectuals who supported the Sandinistas before the 1979 guerrilla victory in Nicaragua. The CGUP hoped to draw the FP-31 opposition together with the less militant FDCR, but it had limited success in this effort during its first year.

Only days before the announcement of the formation of CGUP, Guatemala's four guerrilla organizations, which had hitherto operated independently, announced the formation of the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca—URNG) to coordinate their activities. At that time the URNG announced a five-point program that outlined their vision for Guatemala after the revolutionary victory, which included an end to violent repression and to the political domination of the wealthy, programs to meet the basic needs of the majority, equality between Indians and ladinos, political pluralism with freedom of expression and elections, and non-alignment in international affairs. The URNG was a tentative alliance from the beginning, made by organizations espousing distinctly different political viewpoints. Although the URNG umbrella persisted throughout the intense counterinsurgency campaign waged during its first year of existence, the four guerrilla groups continued to act as independent organizations (see *Threats to Internal Security*, ch. 5).

The strongest of the guerrilla groups was the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres—EGP), which reputedly had 2,000 to 3,000 members in the early 1980s. Organized in the department of Quiché in 1972 by remnants of the guerrillas who were decimated during the 1960s, the EGP began recruiting Indians in the late 1970s and also built a widespread support network among Highland peasants during the next few years. The EGP was ardently Marxist, and some of its members allegedly fought with the Prolonged Popular War (Guerra Popular Prolongada—GPP) faction of the Sandinistas in 1975 and 1979, at which time it studied this brand of guerrilla war

emphasizing political indoctrination. In 1982 the EGP operated on seven fronts scattered throughout western Guatemala and was able to claim a truly national political organization, working closely with the CUC and other members of the FP-31. By early 1983 it was apparent that the counterinsurgency efforts of the government had had a grave effect on the EGP, but most analysts agreed that it was their Highlands support network, rather than the guerrillas themselves, that suffered most. In March the EGP admitted it had been unprepared and ill equipped for the intense army campaign of the previous nine months and vowed to concentrate in the future on "the annihilation of army units and the recovery of weapons."

The next most important guerrilla group was the Organization of People in Arms (Organización del Pueblo en Armas—ORPA), which reportedly had been preparing itself for eight years before launching into guerrilla activity in 1979. The vast majority of its members were alleged to be Indians. Its efforts were concentrated on military rather than political activities, and from its own statements during its first four years of activity, ORPA appeared to be the only guerrilla organization that was not Marxist. ORPA's operations spread eastward along the Pacific coast from the department of San Marcos. Previously, ORPA had also operated in Guatemala City, until it was uncovered and destroyed in 1981. Its rural component was also said to have been badly damaged in the 1982-83 army offensive.

The Rebel Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes—FAR) was Guatemala's oldest guerrilla organization, dating from the early 1960s. Both the EGP and ORPA began as splinters from the FAR. After its near elimination in the late 1960s, the FAR established itself as a small guerrilla band in the sparsely populated department of Petén. In the late 1970s the FAR also played a key role in trade union activities in Guatemala City, but this ended with the fierce repression of the CNT and CNUS federations in 1979 and 1980. In 1982 the FAR opened a new guerrilla front in the department of Chimaltenango, but this effort also failed, a victim of the subsequent counterinsurgency campaign. In early 1983 the FAR remained small and relatively ineffective.

The least effective of the four organizations within the URNG was the PGT, which had spawned the FAR in 1962 and had continued to splinter ever since. In early 1983 it contained three tiny factions, all of which were active militarily. The faction that joined the URNG labeled itself "Nucleus" (Núcleo). The official PGT did not begin military campaigns until 1981, specializing in terrorist actions, such as kidnappings and assassinations. It also held residual influence in the trade union movement and, as the remnant of the official Soviet-line communist party, had strong international links. In early 1983 there were no public reports on the effect of the recent counterinsurgency campaign on the PGT.

Two other tiny groups, outside the URNG, were thought to exist in early 1983. The Popular Revolutionary Movement (Movimiento Popular Revolucionario—MPR-Ixil), believed to be a splinter from ORPA,

engaged in the highly publicized kidnapping of the daughter of Honduran president Roberto Suazo Córdova in Guatemala City in December 1982. Another group, the Central American Workers' Party (Partido de los Trabajadores Centroamericanos—PTC), was alleged to have forces in several Central American countries in early 1983, including a small contingent in Guatemala.

### **The Electoral System**

In March 1983 the Guatemalan electoral system was in the midst of what government authorities planned to be vast changes in both the rules of the system and the actors that had dominated the system for almost 30 years. After the March 1982 coup the electoral system was suspended, and all elected officials were dismissed; a year later new laws were decreed that would govern the system and the organization of political parties in the future. Among the provisions of these new laws were the creation of the Electoral Registry, which would be more independent of the executive than previously, and the lowering of the number of signatures necessary to register a party from 15,000 to 4,000. If this reorganization were not interrupted, either by internal pressures on Ríos Montt, revolution, or a coup d'état that would abort the inauguration of the new system, then a new array of political parties and a new system for their participation in the political process would gradually evolve during the mid-1980s. The former political parties would be required to seek legal recognition anew; analysts believed that most of the former parties would be resurrected, at least in name, and that several would factionalize so that, initially, there would be 10 or more parties.

No objective analyst would dispute that the system in place for most of the period from 1954 to 1982 had become corrupted to a massive degree and that it had failed almost completely to function democratically, that is, as a means of periodically transferring political and governmental power through the freely expressed will of the citizenry. For most of this period, at least between 1974 and 1982, the electoral system served first and foremost as a means to put a stamp of legitimacy, through the creation of a democratic facade, on the perpetuation of military dictatorships.

### **Political Parties**

Before political party activity was suspended in March 1982, there were eight legally registered parties. In addition, there were two parties, the Socialist Democratic Party (Partido Socialista Democrática—PSD) and the PGT, which were not legally recognized. The PSD had spent several years in futile attempts to gain legal recognition and began to operate largely clandestinely after its president, Alberto Fuentes Mohr, and most of the rest of its leadership were assassinated during the Lucas García regime. Some PSD leaders became active in the FDCR and the CGUP (see Civilian Political Actors, this ch.). The PGT had been illegal since 1954, and by 1981 even its political leadership had turned to guerrilla activity. Finally, there were local parties, called

political committees—of individuals not tied to any national party. The activities of political committees were not suspended in 1982.

The National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional—MLN) was probably the largest and best organized of all the legal parties. It was founded by Castillo Armas in the mid-1950s under another name and has been led by Mario Sandoval Alarcon ever since the assassination of Castillo Armas in 1957. It has remained a party of the extreme right. Sandoval has openly described the MLN as the "party of organized violence," made in the image of the Spanish Falange. Repeated allegations linking the MLN with death squads, such as the Organized National Anticommunist Movement (Movimiento Anticomunista Nacional Organizado—MANO, Mano Blanca, or White Hand), the New Anticommunist Organization (Nueva Organización Anticomunista—NOA), and the ESA, have never been denied by Sandoval. Support for the MLN comes from the most conservative large landowners (it is particularly strong among coffee growers) and from segments of the middle class.

The MLN was favored by the government during the early 1970s, but after 1976 it gradually moved into a position of opposition; by 1982 its leaders plotted with segments of the army in attempts to overthrow Lucas García and, after March, Ríos Montt. By 1983 the vice president of the MLN, Leonel Sisniega Otero, was being sought by authorities for this leadership role in these plots and presumably was in exile. Sandoval continued to head the MLN despite the fact that some observers believed that he, too, was party to the recent subversive activities of the MLN.

Another rightist party, though not as radical as the MLN, was the Authentic Nationalist Center (Central Auténtica Nacionalista—CAN). Founded in the early 1970s as the Organized Aramista Center (Central Aramista Organizada—CAO), in 1977 it changed its name and was legally recognized as the CAN. Only very gradually did it move away from being a personalistic vehicle for Arana Osorio. By the early 1980s it had come to stand for free market capitalism and anticommunism. Its organizational efforts during the late 1970s among industrialists, segments of the middle class, and landowners in the eastern part of the country bore fruit in a surprisingly strong showing in the 1980 municipal elections. Some attributed the 1980 success to the fact that the department of highways was run by a high CAN official, who ordered the party's slogans to be painted at key points along the nation's highways.

The Institutional Democratic Party (Partido Institucional Democrático—PID) was established in 1964 by Peralta Azurdia in an effort to build a personal power base. Because every military government since that time has come to power in a coalition that included the PID, many analysts have called it the party of the military. In fact, it would be more accurate to characterize the PID as the party of government bureaucrats (of whom there were well over 100,000 in the early 1980s) or, alternatively, the party of opportunism. The secret to its electoral

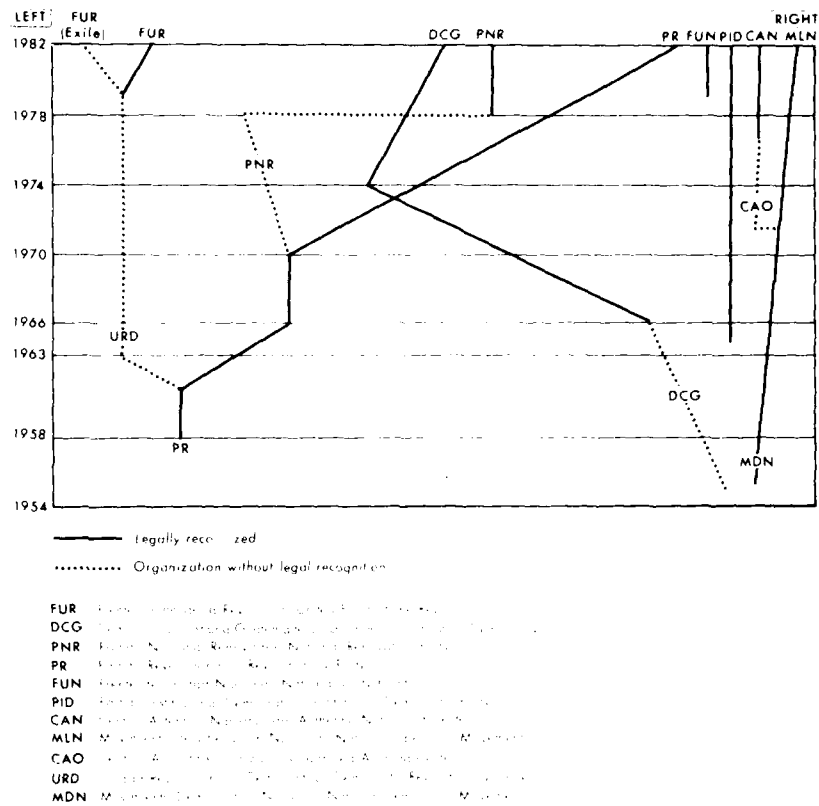
success lay in the fact that it consistently followed the dominant faction of the military and that the party itself never challenged the military president for a share of the power. The PID had no meaningful political program or leadership. Its complicity with the dictatorship from 1970 to 1982 left its future in doubt in 1983.

The Revolutionary Party (Partido Revolucionario—PR) has perhaps the most checkered history of all political parties (see fig. 6). It was founded in 1955 by moderate and progressive members of the middle class and was led in its early years by Mario Méndez Montenegro. Its founders called for a return to social and economic reforms of the 1944 revolution and rejected communism; beyond that the party's ideology was vague. Disagreements caused the more progressive elements to splinter away during the early 1960s, but in 1966 Julio César Méndez Montenegro won the presidency for the PR after his brother died under mysterious circumstances. Though Méndez served his full term, real power was usurped by the army (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, this ch.). Then in 1970 newly elected president Arana Osorio took control of the PR by corrupting some leaders and murdering others; some who survived left to form new parties. The PR moved radically to the right and came under the leadership of Jorge García Granados, who was from an old, aristocratic, landholding family and a cousin of Lucas García. As general secretary of the Office of the Presidency during the Lucas García presidency, García Granados was widely held to have been a major beneficiary of the corruption and thievery that took place during that regime. He was purged from the PR in 1983, however, and the remaining party leaders have sought to dissociate the PR from García Granados and the disastrous Lucas García presidency.

Guatemalan Christian Democracy (Democracia Cristiana Guatemalteca—DCG) was originally formed in 1955 with the help of the rightist Catholic archbishop, but by 1966, when it was first legally recognized, moderate elements had assumed the party's leadership. Its strength grew gradually until 1974, when it allegedly won the presidency only to have it taken away through electoral fraud. Perhaps thinking that only a military officer could be elected president, the Christian Democrats had chosen General Ríos Montt, a recent chief of staff of the army who was seen as a leader of the more moderate segments within the army, as their presidential candidate in 1974. The party did not learn from its mistake, and in 1978 it again recruited a moderate military leader, who ran a distant third as its presidential candidate.

The efforts of DCG leaders to preserve a moderate, centrist political stance made the party enemies on both the left and, especially, the right. During the Lucas García presidency scores of local DCG leaders were killed in rural areas. Nevertheless, the party retained some organizational capability. In early 1983 the Christian Democrats were led by Vinicio Cerezo Arévalo, although some observers speculated that challenges to his leadership could lead to party factionalization.





Source: Based on information from Edelberto Torres-Rivas, "La Democracia y la Contrarevolución en Guatemala," in Gabriel Aguilar, ed., *Dialéctica del Terror en Guatemala*, San José, Costa Rica, 1980, 20.

Figure 6. Evolution of Major Political Parties, 1954-82

The United Front of the Revolution (Frente Unido de la Revolución—FUR) was legally recognized in 1979 after nearly two decades of existence and, at that time, was the only legal party of the left. The party was originally called the Democratic Revolutionary Unit (Unidad Revolucionaria Democrática—URD), which had been founded by the progressives who broke from the PR during the early 1960s. Its leadership was made up largely of social democratic intellectuals who called for vast socioeconomic reform to benefit the poor. Under the leadership of Manuel Colom Argueta in the 1970s, the FUR built a strong following among the urban middle class.

In a 1979 interview, Colom Argueta said that "in exchange [for the party's legal recognition by the government], they may want my head." A week later he was gunned down by an assassination squad of a dozen or more men. His funeral was attended by an estimated 200,000 people.

but this murder nevertheless proved to be only the opening salvo in what became the systematic elimination of FUR leaders over the next two years. Using the same strategy used by Arana Osorio against the PR in the early 1970s, moderate leaders were corrupted at the same time, and the legal FUR suddenly became content with the status quo. The former leaders who were not killed continued the organization of the FUR in exile, and several became affiliated with the FDGR and the CGUP along with PSD individuals in exile. The FUR declined to run a candidate in the 1982 elections, and a year later it was uncertain how the social democratic politicians associated with the FUR and the PSD, still in exile, would respond to the political opening promised by the Ríos Montt regime.

The National Renovation Party (Partido Nacional Renovador—PNR) was originally a splinter from the PR in 1970, but by the time it was granted legal recognition in 1975, it had acquired new leadership. The legal PNR was essentially purchased as a vehicle for the political ambitions of Alejandro Maldonado Aguirre, who the previous year had been purged from the MLN for defying the leadership of Sandoval. The PNR projected itself as a centrist party, emphasizing the necessity of reforms (particularly in education) rather than military solutions to the nation's problems. Its support came from moderate industrialists and segments of the middle class.

The remaining legal political party before the 1982 coup was the National Unity Front (Frente de Unidad Nacional—FUN). Originally formed by a group of supporters of Peralta Azurdia in 1979 and immediately recognized by Lucas García, the FUN was a minor conservative party that had little if any political backing, or even organization, by 1982.

These eight parties (actually seven, because the FUR boycotted the 1980 and 1982 elections) often formed alliances among themselves for electoral purposes. Presidents Arana Osorio and Langerud came to power under the banners of the PID and the MLN, Lucas García under the PID and PR labels, and Brigadier General Angel Aníbal Guevara, who was declared the winner of the aborted 1982 election, campaigned with the PID, the PR, and the FUN. The parties that ran in opposition to the declared winners also formed a variety of alliances over the years: in 1982 the PNR and the DCG ran as allies, while the MLN and the CAN each ran independent campaigns. Ultimately, however, neither the political parties nor the alliances really mattered between 1970 and 1982. The success of a party had nothing to do with its organizational strength, popular support, or charismatic leaders. The PID was in every governing coalition between 1970 and 1982 because it consistently sided with the military faction in power. Once elected, the PID had little to do with governing.

### **Elections**

In March 1983 Ríos Montt announced the formation, by the following June 30, of a new five-member Electoral Registry, whose function would be to rewrite the 1965 electoral code; rectify the nation's elec-

toral rolls after years of corruption, fraud, and warfare; and oversee the election of a constituent assembly. The assembly, in turn, would write a new constitution that would schedule elections for government officials. Although no timetable accompanied the announcement, analysts presumed at the time that constituent assembly elections would take place in 1984 and elections for president, a legislature, and local officials would take place in 1985. This timetable was dependent, of course, on Ríos Montt's being able to preserve a modicum of political stability over the intervening years.

Few Guatemalans mourned the death of the old electoral system, which had become so thoroughly riddled with corruption and fraud that many voters stayed away from the polls. Voting was compulsory by law for all literate persons over 18 years of age and optional for illiterates (illiterate males had been enfranchised in 1945, females in 1966). Nevertheless, voter abstention grew steadily from 33 percent in 1958 to over 63 percent in 1978. Abstention declined for the first time in over three decades in the 1982 election.

The Electoral Commission controlled all aspects of elections, from the registration of parties to campaigning and to counting the votes. Although the commission was designated an autonomous, independent body in the 1965 constitution, the electoral code, drawn up at the same time, was written to allow the president to name anyone he pleased to the commission. As a result, the degree of fraud perpetrated in any particular election depended, to a large extent, on the proclivities of the regime in power.

Blatantly fraudulent elections in modern times date back to 1957, when public accusations led to the presidential election's being canceled. The repeat election in 1958 was considered generally honest, as were those conducted under the aegis of presidents Peralta Azurdia and Méndez Montenegro. The 1970 election of Arana Osorio was to be the last honest presidential electoral victory for 12 years, however. It was widely perceived that both Ríos Montt in 1974 and Peralta Azurdia in 1978 had victories stolen from them, for each was initially ahead in the vote tally, which was suddenly shielded from public view, after which the candidate favored by the outgoing administration was proclaimed the winner. The same procedure took place during the 1982 vote count, and the coup took place only days after Lucas García's candidate was announced the winner. Close observers of that election, however, believed that, ironically, Guevara could have won the election even without election irregularities and that, relative to 1974 and 1978, the 1982 election was clean.

But the question of the degree of fraud in 1982 was moot, for the announcement of the official winner was followed by street demonstrations by opposition parties and the coup by junior officers. All believed the election had resulted in the third straight fraudulent victory by the official candidate. In early 1983 it was hoped that Ríos Montt, having been a victim in 1974 of an electoral system in which

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

the outcome was predetermined, would oversee elections that would be more honest and independent of the will of the army.

### **Foreign Relations**

Guatemala retained a narrow scope in its foreign relations in the early 1980s, as it had throughout most of its independent history. At that time it held diplomatic relations with fewer than 50 nations worldwide and, of those, only a handful were close relationships with important content. After 1954 relations with the United States dominated Guatemalan concerns with foreign governments; but human rights issues led to serious strains in the late 1970s and lingered into the next decade. This left Guatemala, to a considerable degree, isolated in the world. Efforts begun by the Ríos Montt regime in 1982 to improve the nation's position in the world made little headway during its first year. A xenophobic nationalism that persisted among many Guatemalan leaders and the reluctance of foreign governments to be identified with a nation widely accused of systematic human rights violations remained at the root of Guatemala's isolation.

Guatemala participated in a wide range of multilateral forums, especially the United Nations (UN) and many of its specialized agencies and the Organization of American States (OAS). It consistently held an anticommunist stance on East-West issues and often, though not always, sided with the Third World on North-South issues. It was an active participant in the Group of 77, a body of Third World nations in the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD). In the OAS Guatemala supported the revitalization of the inter-American system and opposed efforts by some Latin American countries in the early 1980s to reorganize the system without United States participation.

### **Latin America**

Guatemala's foreign policy priorities in the early 1980s were reflected in the names of the 10 directorates, or major subdivisions, within the Ministry of Foreign Relations. The only two devoted to particular areas were the Directorate of Central American Affairs and the Directorate of Belize Affairs. Guatemala did not recognize the independence of Belize from Britain in 1981, noting that its claim to the territory dates back to Guatemalan independence in the early nineteenth century. The importance of this claim to successive Guatemalan governments could be seen in assertions in all three post-World War II constitutions that Belize is an integral part of the territory of Guatemala. The Fundamental Statute of Government, which superseded the 1965 constitution in 1982, modified the previous stance significantly to state that "with respect to the Territory of Belize, Guatemala maintains its rightful claim."

Spain and Britain haggled over the relatively unimportant territory of Belize from the seventeenth century to the early nineteenth. After independence Guatemala inherited Spain's claim under the doctrine of *uti possidetis* (possession) that was instrumental in demarcating the



*Guatemala City  
Courtesy Adelfa Fernandez*

borders of Spain's former colonies throughout Latin America. After years of growing competition between Britain and the United States over influence in the Central American isthmus, Britain and Guatemala signed the Anglo-Guatemalan Treaty on the question of Belize in 1859. Although designed to resolve the centuries-old dispute, interpretation of the 1859 treaty soon became a new source of dispute.

The major problem lay in Article 7, in which the two parties "mutually agree conjointly to use their best efforts by taking adequate means for establishing the easiest communication . . . between the fittest place on the Atlantic coast near the settlement of Belize and the capital of Guatemala." Early interpretive disagreements led to an 1863 supplementary convention under which Britain would pay £50,000 to Guatemala, which would then be responsible for building the road. The supplementary convention was never ratified by Guatemala, however, which at the time was preoccupied in a war with El Salvador. By 1867 Britain announced that Guatemala's failure to ratify the convention released Britain from any obligations under the 1859 treaty; Guatemala retorted that it, too, was not bound by the new treaty, and thus Britain had lost the sovereign rights it had been granted eight years earlier. These remained the official positions of both governments for over a century.

The dispute lagged until the 1930s. In 1939, after several years of fruitless diplomatic exchanges and proposals, Guatemala claimed that the 1859 treaty had lapsed because of Britain's failure to fulfill its obligations under Article 7 and that the entire territory of Belize should be Guatemalan because Britain could make no other legal claim to sovereignty. Efforts at reconciliation were aborted by World War II, and the Guatemalan claim henceforth became embodied in its constitutions. Little progress ensued, and in 1963 Britain and Guatemala severed diplomatic relations. In subsequent years British plans to grant independence to Belize were postponed by fears of a Guatemalan invasion of a newly independent republic that would be defenseless without a British military presence.

Eventually, however, Britain pressed its plan for independence. As a solution to the problem of the Guatemalan claim, a tripartite agreement—known as the Heads of Agreement—was concluded in March 1981 between Britain, Guatemala, and Belize. The Heads of Agreement listed 16 topics of discussion, the key to which was Guatemala's abandoning its claim to Belize in exchange for its "use" of Ranguana and Sapodilla cays (off the southern coast of Belize) and the adjacent seas. The details of Guatemala's "use" of the cays and the other topics of discussion were not ironed out when Britain announced that Belize would be independent in September 1981. Guatemala then closed its border with Belize for several months. Independence came, but British troops remained.

Talks briefly resumed between Guatemala and Britain in January 1983. Guatemala did not recognize the independence of Belize and refused to negotiate with its government. The Rios Montt government

modified its historic claim to the entire territory by advancing a claim to the district of Toledo, which consists of the southern one-fifth of Belize. This was flatly rejected by Britain on behalf of Belize, which offered to create a joint economic cooperation zone within an area encompassing 3.2 kilometers on either side of Belize's southern border with Guatemala. This, in turn, was rejected by Guatemala. No future talks were scheduled at that time.

Guatemala's perennially cool relationship with Mexico was not helped by Mexico's vigorous support for Belizean independence. The roots of this bilateral problem go back to 1821, when the inhabitants of Chiapas, who had lived under Spanish colonial authority as part of Guatemala, elected to declare independence with Mexico (see fig. 1). Then in 1842 Mexican troops occupied a portion of Chiapas, known as Soconusco, which bordered the Petén region and had remained a source of controversy since independence. It was not until 1852 that the long boundary between Mexico and Guatemala was fixed in exchange for Guatemala's renouncing all claims to Chiapas and Soconusco. The legacy of that dispute created fears in Guatemala of political and economic domination by its larger neighbor. These fears were exacerbated after the Mexican Revolution in the early twentieth century, when ideological differences placed an undercurrent of mistrust between them.

Both countries realized the economic and political importance in the maintenance of at least an outward appearance of cordial relations. Only very occasionally, such as in the wake of a fishing incident in 1959, were diplomatic relations severed. Since that time, the existence of Guatemalan refugees and exiles in Mexico has periodically been a source of strain.

Since 1954 Mexico has served as the primary haven of Guatemalan political exiles. In 1961 Guatemala made an official complaint to the OAS that exiles were plotting an invasion from Chiapas. Beginning in 1981 the problem became the inflow of refugees into Chiapas who were fleeing the war in Guatemala. As the fighting escalated in late 1982 and early 1983, an estimated 30,000 Guatemalans—some estimates were much higher—were living in refugee camps along the border. Also at the same time, numerous Guatemalan military incursions into Mexican territory were reported in the press. In September the Mexican government issued a formal protest to Guatemala over two such incidents in which five Mexicans were reportedly killed. These and other allegations of incursions into Mexico were denied by Guatemala, but their military officials repeatedly complained of guerrillas using refugee camps to escape Guatemalan authorities. In March 1983 Guatemalan Treasury Police briefly closed the border to all traffic. Despite these difficulties, relations between military officials of the two nations were said to remain fraternal.

If Guatemala felt weak and small next to Mexico, it felt large and powerful when compared with its Central American neighbors to the south. Guatemala has often been a dominant political and economic force in the region. Spanish colonial Guatemala had extended as far

south as the present Costa Rican-Panamanian border), and Guatemala had been a primary advocate of political union among the region's five postindependence republics throughout much of the nineteenth century. Guatemala was also a principal supporter of post-World War II Central American integration efforts that bore fruit in the 1960s as the Central American Common Market (CACM) and the Central American Defense Council (Consejo de Defensa Centroamericana - Condeca). When these two organizations were operative, Guatemala was, as the largest economic and military power in the region, a primary beneficiary. Both declined, however, in the 1970s. The decline of the CACM was gradual, precipitated initially by the 1969 Soccer War between Honduras and El Salvador; the collapse of Condeca came suddenly after the 1979 revolution in Nicaragua. The regionwide crisis of the next four years drastically altered the relationships among Central American nations. Guatemala, embroiled in its own domestic crisis, retreated from its leading role of previous years.

Nicaraguan president Anastasio Somoza Debayle had been a close friend and confidant of a number of Guatemalan military leaders in the 1970s, and his fall from power had a profound effect on Guatemala (see *The 1970s*, ch. 1). The Lucas García regime, seeing Somoza's imminent fall, declined his last-minute request for military intervention against the Sandinistas. Despite the profound mistrust and even hatred between the Guatemalan government and the revolutionary Nicaraguan government, efforts were made by both parties to maintain correct diplomatic relations, with ambassadors in each nation's capital. When counterrevolutionary activities against the Sandinistas increased in 1982, Ríos Montt pledged that Guatemala would not take part in any such multinational effort aimed at the Nicaraguan government. The 1954 invasion of Guatemala by counterrevolutionaries based in Honduras left Guatemalan leaders profoundly aware of the effects of foreign military intervention.

The relationship with the democratic government of Costa Rica was little better. The underlying tension lay in Costa Rica's dogged pursuit of democratic values and its tolerance of pluralistic politics, which were excessive in the eyes of Guatemalan rulers. Suspicious long held by Guatemalan conservative leaders that Costa Rican leaders were inclined to subvert dictatorial regimes were confirmed when Costa Rica harbored Sandinista guerrillas before their overthrow of Somoza.

Guatemala's relations with Honduras and El Salvador were better. Relations between military officials were especially close, and on more than one occasion during his first year in office, Ríos Montt held cordial meetings with the civilian presidents of each country. This cordiality had not always been the case; border disputes and, in the case of El Salvador, political rivalries had led to protracted tensions and occasional hostilities during the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The border with Honduras was finally demarcated in 1933 and that with El Salvador in 1935.



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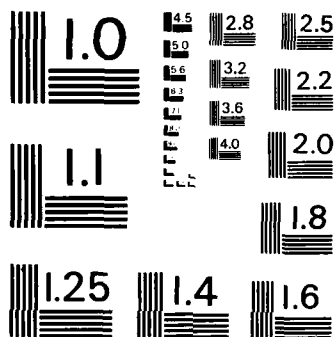
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Economic relations with Guatemala's four Central American neighbors were less volatile than were political relations. High officials in the Guatemalan Ministry of Economy met often with their counterparts throughout the region during the early 1980s. At that time numerous bilateral and multilateral trade agreements were concluded which, many hoped, would be a prelude to the revitalization of the dormant CACM, which continued to maintain headquarters in Guatemala City.

The growing political polarization in the region was naturally of great concern to Guatemala. After it had been excluded from the Central American Democratic Community, a multilateral forum organized in October 1982 to address the problems of the region, Guatemala offered to act as a mediator in the escalating dispute between Honduras and Nicaragua. This offer was not accepted, but in April 1983 Guatemala was asked to participate, along with the other four regional nations, in multilateral talks aimed at bringing peace to the region.

Guatemalan relations with the rest of Latin America were secondary at best. In the case of the newly independent nations of the English-speaking Caribbean and the northern tier of South America (Suriname and Guyana), diplomatic relations were nonexistent. Formal relations were maintained with Haiti, the Dominican Republic, Panama, and the rest of the nations of South America. The only countries that maintained significant political relationships with Guatemala were Chile and Argentina. Both had active military relationships with Guatemala as well during the late 1970s and early 1980s, supplying modest amounts of training assistance. Guatemala staunchly supported Argentina during the Falklands/Malvinas war of 1982. This may have been partly out of loyalty to a friend but was largely motivated by the similarity of Guatemala's territorial dispute with Britain.

#### **The United States**

The United States has long been the most important actor in Guatemalan foreign relations. During the 1944-54 period of revolution, increasing United States hostility at what it perceived as increasing communist influence within the government was capped by support for the 1954 counterrevolutionary invasion (see *The Counterrevolution*, ch. 1). After 1954 the United States became the key foreign ally of successive Guatemalan governments, largely through the provision of economic and security assistance. The United States remained a key trading partner, routinely accounting for some one-third of Guatemala's export and import trade. Direct investment by American private firms was modest by United States standards but in the Guatemalan context was considerable. By the mid-1970s American private direct investment, estimated at US\$200 million, represented 10 percent of all private investment in Guatemala and about 3 percent of its total gross domestic product (GDP—see Glossary).

But the provision of United States government foreign assistance was even more essential. Between 1962 and 1976 economic assistance totaled some US\$240 million. Almost US\$200 million of this was through the Agency for International Development (AID); most of the remain-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

der were PL-480 (Food for Peace) grants. During those same years approximately US\$48 million in military aid was provided. About half this total was through the Foreign Military Sales program; the remainder was divided among the Military Assistance Program, the International Military Education and Training program (IMET) and grants of Excess Defense Articles (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, this ch; *Foreign Military Influence*, ch. 5).

The largest quantity of United States aid went through AID to rural development projects aimed at helping small farmers. Health programs provided equipment to rural clinics and hospitals; educational projects trained teachers in a variety of subjects, including bilingual education; and agricultural projects provided credits and other assistance to small farmers and played a central role in the development of rural cooperatives. After the 1976 earthquake US\$25 million in United States emergency aid was distributed through AID and PL-480. Between 1957 and 1974, nearly US\$5 million in AID funds were used to train the Guatemalan police through the now-defunct Office of Public Safety.

The long-standing cordial relationship between the two countries was rudely interrupted with the publication of the United States Department of State's first human rights report in March 1977. The highly condemnatory report was rejected by the Guatemalan government as amounting to interference in its internal affairs, and at the same time it announced that it would reject any military assistance offered by the United States. This was to be the beginning of four stormy years in United States-Guatemalan relations under President Jimmy Carter that saw one United States ambassador removed after one year at the post and his replacement rejected by the Guatemalan government, leaving the post vacant in late 1980 and early 1981. Before he left, Ambassador Frank Ortiz described Guatemala as a "bloodbath waiting to happen." Acrimony became so common that Guatemalan government officials came to think that the Department of State had become infiltrated with Marxists. Carter was blamed for the fall of Somoza in 1979. In a major speech in September 1980, President Lucas García vowed that "the gringos are not going to teach us what democracy is." All attempts by the United States to improve the relationship were rejected either by the human rights-conscious United States Congress or by the increasingly xenophobic Guatemalan regime.

United States economic aid continued throughout these years (in 1979 AID assistance was nearly US\$25 million), as did military assistance "in the pipeline" before the 1977 rupture. On several occasions, however, United States human rights concerns led to the blocking of certain loans to Guatemala offered by multilateral lending agencies, such as the World Bank (see Glossary) and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). United States policy in this matter subsequently changed, however, and in late 1982 it rescinded its previous objection to World Bank and IDB loans to Guatemala.

President Ronald Reagan assumed office determined to improve the sorry state of United States relations with Guatemala. Efforts were

made in the economic area: in addition to opening up multilateral lending to Guatemala, AID assistance was increased, including US\$10 million in Emergency Support Funds under the Caribbean Basin Initiative (CBI). Another area of concern to the new president was in the field of military assistance, which he deemed imperative in order to counteract the growing guerrilla threat in Guatemala and throughout Central America.

The Reagan administration sought to improve relations in 1981 by reclassifying a number of items from military to nonmilitary categories that did not require congressional approval. One hundred jeeps and 50 two-and-one-half-ton trucks, valued at over US\$3 million, were sold to Guatemala through this mechanism in June 1981. A number of civilian-model helicopters, which did not require export licenses, were also sold to Guatemala in 1981 and 1982. In late 1982 evidence appeared in the United States press that shipments of other United States military equipment had been secretly arriving in Guatemala during the previous two years and that two United States military personnel were serving as instructors in the Guatemalan military academy.

Little progress was made in overcoming restrictions by the United States Congress to military aid until the March 1982 coup that brought Ríos Montt to power. Guatemalan efforts to improve its human rights image—vital to United States congressional approval of military aid—were hampered, however, by allegations of numerous massacres conducted by the Guatemalan Army in its stepped-up counterinsurgency campaign of late 1982. Ríos Montt pressed his case in a December 1982 meeting with Reagan in Honduras. Reagan, in turn, pressed his case in Washington and in January 1983—arguing that the Guatemalan human rights situation, albeit not yet satisfactory, was steadily improving—lifted the five-year-old embargo on military cash sales. This allowed Guatemala to purchase US\$6.3 million of equipment, but as of mid-1983 it had not done so, stating that it lacked the necessary foreign exchange. The Reagan administration budget for fiscal year 1984 slated Guatemala for over US\$10 million in United States military assistance.

These efforts went a long way toward improving the acrimonious state of bilateral relations. Problems remained in early 1983, however, and they continued to focus on human rights. In January the United States protested to the Guatemalan ambassador in Washington over the handling of an arrest of a United States citizen in Guatemala. Then in March the United States ambassador was briefly recalled to Washington to order to signal United States displeasure over the murder of a Guatemalan working on an AID-sponsored project. It was clear at that time that United States concerns with human rights issues and suspicions of the United States by Guatemalan officials—the causes of soured relations in prior years—had been only partly erased.

#### **Extrahemisphere**

Guatemalan relations with nations outside the Western Hemisphere were extremely limited in scope. The Guatemalan ambassador in Egypt,

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

for example, represented Guatemala throughout Africa and in part of the Middle East. The ambassador in Japan was also Guatemala's representative in Australia, India, the Philippines, and the Republic of Korea (South Korea). Guatemala had no diplomatic relations with any communist nations of Europe or Asia, though it did conduct commercial relations with the Soviet Union, Poland, Czechoslovakia, Yugoslavia, and China (which reportedly bought half of Guatemala's cotton exports during the early 1980s). In Western Europe diplomatic relations had been severed with Britain since 1963 and with Spain since 1980. During the 1970s and early 1980s, Guatemala conducted trade with the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Austria, France, Switzerland, Italy, and Belgium; all but West Germany conducted modest trade in military assistance with Guatemala.

Taiwan was a more important supplier of training and technical assistance to the Guatemalan Army. But by far the most important relationship in this respect during the late 1970s and early 1980s was Israel. Israeli military aid during this time was important; by the early 1980s the Galil rifle, Uzi submachine gun, and a variety of Israeli combat gear were standard issue for the Guatemalan Army. Israel also sold transport planes to Guatemala, and an army communications school opened in 1981 was built with Israeli assistance and technology. Israel was also very active in Guatemala through a variety of assistance programs in the area of agricultural development. In early 1983 Israel was reported to be playing a role in Guatemala's "model communities" program being conducted in the western Highlands in conjunction with the counterinsurgency campaign.

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In early 1983 there were few sources of unbiased and detailed information regarding the Guatemalan government and politics. Three chapters concerning Guatemala in Thomas P. Anderson's *Politics in Central America* were among the best. A two-part study by George Black published in the *NACLA Report on the Americas* in early 1983 was valuable, though not unbiased. Richard Newbold Adams' 1970 study, *Crucifixion by Power*, remained the best study of the structural aspects controlling Guatemalan politics. Current information is best obtained in the *Latin America Weekly Report* and *Latin America Regional Report for Mexico and Central America*, from London, and the weekly *Central America Report*, published in Guatemala City. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Chapter 5. National Security



*Anthropomorphic incense burner, circa A.D. 600-900, San Agustín  
Acasaguastlán*



**THE COUNTRY'S ARMED FORCES** for many years have been concerned more with internal security than with defense against external threats. At various times Guatemalan presidents have made threatening remarks about taking over Belize, a former colony that Britain has vowed to defend, but such threats have usually been more for political purposes at home rather than actually a challenge to Britain. Essentially, the primary mission of the armed forces for almost three decades has been the same as that of the police forces, that is, maintenance of public order. Since the early 1960s the security forces—military and police—have been heavily engaged in counterinsurgency operations.

Although actual guerrilla warfare did not commence until 1962, for eight years before the first attack there had been violent disorder in town and country that the security forces had been hard put to contain. Several times in the more than 20 years since the outbreak of the insurgency, government forces have been successful in putting down the fighting and dispersing the insurgents. Guerrilla leaders have been killed and guerrilla ranks thinned almost to extinction, but the movement has revived each time to renew attacks against the government. When the insurgency was destroyed in the mountains of Zacapa and Izabal in the late 1960s, the surviving fighters moved into Guatemala City to begin a new phase, changing their tactics to meet the changed environment. Death squads countered urban terrorism, but the heavy death toll among noncombatants and political activists was so high that Guatemala earned the condemnation of governments and human rights organizations around the world.

The president in mid-1983, Brigadier General José Efraín Ríos Montt, came to office through a coup d'état in 1982. Having a military officer as president has been a common occurrence, and exceptions have been rare. From the downfall of the last traditional caudillo in 1944 to mid-1983, only two civilians had held the highest office. In the four presidential elections from 1970 until 1982, army officers retained the presidency, frequently through manipulated elections. On March 23, 1982, a group of young officers deposed the incumbent and his hand-picked successor, whom the dissidents claimed had been elected fraudulently. Fraud in the elections of 1974 and 1978 had been so blatant that some observers in 1982 opined that the most recent election had been relatively clean. Nevertheless, electoral fraud and corruption headed the list of complaints of the officers perpetrating the coup. A three-man junta lasted only until June, at which time Ríos Montt, backed by the young officers, ousted his junta colleagues and assumed the presidency.

Traditionally, the armed forces had maintained a close association with the armed forces of the United States. The police also maintained close ties from the mid-1960s to the mid-1970s through the auspices of the United States Agency for International Development. The Gua-

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

temalan forces used American weapons and equipment, had American advisers, and sent officers and noncommissioned officers to Panama and the United States for training in service schools. These close ties evaporated in 1977 when Washington criticized Guatemalan human rights violations. For the next several years there was no United States military assistance program to Guatemala, and that government was forced to seek weapons and advisers from other suppliers. In early 1983 Washington was continuing its attempt to sort out the controversies involving human rights, hoping to renew the close ties that had previously existed.

The Guatemalan Army is by far the most prominent of the three armed forces; in fact, the air force and the navy are integral parts of the army but are treated separately because of mission and tradition. The air force and the navy each had a few hundred men and officers in early 1983, whereas the army had about 27,000 and was apparently growing. The National Police, which historically has had paramilitary attributes, was also a powerful force in 1983, numbering about 9,500. Control of the army and the police has been critical to presidents since the early 1950s.

### **Position of Armed Forces in Government and Society**

During much of Guatemala's history as an independent republic, military officers have headed the government, frequently in the role of caudillo, or dictator, less frequently as the duly elected president. Since the overthrow of President (Colonel) Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán in 1954, only one elected president has been a civilian, and charges of fraud have been common in most elections. For example, Ríos Montt, the incumbent in mid-1983, claimed with considerable justification that the office had been stolen from him when he was a candidate in the election of 1974. The people expressed some of their sentiments about the system four years later when about 40 percent of the eligible voters stayed away from the polls and another 20 percent cast ballots that were in such poor condition that they had to be invalidated.

Ríos Montt came to power as a member of a junta with Brigadier General Horacio Egberto Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Francisco Luis Gordillo Martínez. The junta was installed by six younger army officers who had engineered the coup d'état of March 23, 1982. A little more than two months later, Ríos Montt, with the backing of the military, announced the resignation of the other two junta members and proclaimed his own accession to the presidency. As president he also became "general commander of the army" in addition to continuing in the role of minister of national defense, which he had assumed after the coup. Within a few months, as the new president consolidated his power, he relinquished the defense portfolio and appointed Brigadier General Oscar Humberto Mejía Victores to that post.

It was impossible to assess the attitudes of the citizenry toward the armed forces in the early 1980s, although indications of discontent with the government per se obviously applied to the military or at least to

the military hierarchy. As far as is known, no polls have ever been taken concerning such matters; nevertheless, certain assumptions can be made about the factors on which such attitudes might be based. Having the military in control of the government throughout much of the country's history has to be considered a major factor in determining how the people feel about these institutions. Another critical factor has to be the state of virtual civil war that has existed for at least two decades. In that conflict the reputation of the military has suffered from reports of human rights violations, including massacres of civilians by the armed forces as they have conducted operations against the ever-present guerrillas. Additionally, successive military regimes have been accused of corruption, a fact cited as a major cause by the young officers who staged the 1982 coup d'état.

The position of the postcoup armed forces in the society remained highly controversial more than a year after the coup. Sources differed on the changes that occurred during the first year of the Ríos Montt regime, some saying that nothing had changed, others making seemingly exaggerated claims for the new rulers. The corruption of the preceding decade had evidently been halted under Ríos Montt, although no military officer had been publicly punished for misdeeds in the previous administration and no confiscations of real estate or bank accounts had been made.

#### **Constitutional Basis**

The 1965 constitution was set aside by the junta in late March 1982, and a short time later the Fundamental Statute of Government was promulgated to serve as the country's basic law (see Constitutional Basis, ch. 4). The provisions pertaining to the armed forces, that is, the Guatemalan Army (Ejército de Guatemala), were essentially unchanged. The junta was designated as the highest military authority, but that soon changed when the other members of the junta were forced out and Ríos Montt assumed the presidency and the function of commander in chief of the forces.

The Fundamental Statute declares that the army—composed of land, sea, and air forces—is the institution designated “to safeguard and maintain the independence, sovereignty and the honor of the Nation, the integrity of its territory and the peace of the Republic.” The army is described as a nondeliberative body, the organization of which is hierarchical and based on principles of discipline and obedience. The army is also described as apolitical, although it has become the nation's dominant political interest group (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4). The organization of private paramilitary bodies or militias is listed as a punishable offense.

Male citizens are obligated by the Fundamental Statute, as they had been by the constitution, to serve and defend the country. According to the statute they are obligated “to perform military service in accordance with the law.”

The president, as general commander, is given the power in the basic law to decree mobilization and demobilization. Ríos Montt made

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

use of this authority on July 1, 1962, when he issued a decree-law calling for the partial mobilization of all "Guatemalan citizens from 18 to 30 years of age who had done obligatory military service in the Permanent Force and the Career Officers who are retired from the Army for any circumstance and are included in the ages mentioned above."

#### **Military Traditions**

The peoples of Guatemala look back on different heritages—the Indians have their own legends, the ladinos (see Glossary) have theirs. The Indians are descended from the Mayans, who controlled the area in pre-Columbian times. The ladinos comprise the remainder of the population, that is, everyone who is non-Indian, including many Indians who have given up their own languages and customs (see Regional and Ethnic Diversity, ch. 2). Remaining largely unassimilated more than four and one-half centuries after the Spanish conquest, the Indians retain their own legacies and traditions and, for those who are aware of their history, their military hero is the legendary Tecún Umán, who fell in battle while leading the Quiché tribes against the invading forces of Pedro de Alvarado in 1524. According to legend, Tecún Umán, on foot and armed with a spear, sought out the mounted, armor-clad Alvarado, who then killed the Indian chieftain in hand-to-hand combat, setting the stage for the total defeat of the leaderless Quiché.

Alvarado, a typical Spanish conquistador, was sent from Mexico by Hernán Cortés to conquer Central America for the Spanish crown and for the greater glory and enrichment of the conquistadores. He is remembered as a brilliant, ruthless military tactician who led a small band of Spaniards, along with various Indian allies, against seemingly overwhelming odds to bring Central America under Spanish control. Alvarado was made governor of the captaincy general of Guatemala and held that position until his death in 1541, despite absences to lead armies seeking further conquests and trips to Spain on two different occasions.

Defeat of the Indian nations by such small numbers of Spanish invaders was made possible by several factors, including the Indians' awe of fighting men on horseback, which they had not encountered previously. A major factor, however, was the internecine warfare that had become endemic among the Indian tribes long before the arrival of the Europeans. Alvarado is sometimes pictured as marching into Central America with only 100 cavalry and 300 foot soldiers, but he had also enlisted or conscripted Indian allies along the way from Mexico who welcomed the opportunity to fight against ancient enemies, oblivious to the evident signs that the invaders cared nothing for indigenous peoples or cultures. Furthermore, Alvarado entered Guatemala at a time when the Mayan culture was already in a state of decline; his conquest merely speeded the process.

The pre-Columbian Guatemalans succumbed not only to superior Spanish weapons and tactics but also to deceit and ruthlessness. Despite loss of their leaders and subjugation, however, they continued

to revolt against the alien invaders. For the next three centuries the Spanish ruled as conquerors, laying the groundwork for the dual society—one ladino, one Indian—that continued to exist in the early 1980s, more than 160 years after independence from the Spanish had been achieved.

The end of Spanish rule required no military action on the part of the Guatemalans. It followed in the wake of the Mexican revolt against Spain and resulted in a short period of Mexican domination that ended with the formation two years later of the United Provinces of Central America (known as the Federation of Central America, or Central American Federation). The federation, which had its capital in Guatemala City, had a short, turbulent existence wracked by civil wars. It was finally dissolved in 1847 with the establishment of five independent states (see fig. 2). Guatemala, which had been practically autonomous since 1839, spent most of the time from then until 1944 under the control of one military despot after another. During a long period and for most of the time since, the primary task of the armed forces have been maintaining internal security and providing support to the incumbent president.

In 1838 an illiterate caudillo, José Rafael Carrera, had ousted the president of the Guatemala province and challenged the authority of Francisco Morazán, president of the federation. A peasant of mixed Indian, Negro, and Spanish background, Carrera was unlettered but by no means ignorant, as he demonstrated by manipulating the intense Conservative-Liberal politics of the period to suit his own purposes (see *Independent Guatemala: The Early Years*, ch. 1). A virtual dictator, Carrera used his army not only to keep himself in power but also to establish and maintain friendly governments in neighboring states. He ruled with an iron fist; after his death in 1865 his handpicked successor, General Vicente Cerna, continued the same militaristic, dictatorial policies until his ouster six years later.

Somewhat representative of the activities of the armed forces after independence was the "revolution" begun by General Justo Rufino Barrios and General Miguel García Granados, which overthrew the government of Cerna. The two generals returned from exile at the head of an "army" of 45 men and, meeting no resistance, deposed Cerna and installed García Granados in the presidency. The military establishment permitted the overthrow simply by refusing to support the incumbent and switching its allegiance to the insurgents. It has not been uncommon in Guatemalan history for the allegiance of the military to be to the dictator of the moment rather than to the country or to the constitution. Barrios succeeded to the presidency in 1873 and established a military dictatorship equal in power and despotism to that of Carrera but from a different ideological perspective. Barrios is credited with making the army a permanent national institution, which during his tenure was relatively well trained and professionally competent. A strong advocate of the Central American Federation, Barrios built up the army to achieve that goal by force if necessary. In

1855 he proclaimed reunification, and when the other nations ignored the proclamation, he led his army in an invasion of El Salvador where he was killed in the first battle, thereby ending that particular attempt to revive the federation.

The next caudillo to rely on the relatively large army and police force to maintain a dictatorship in defiance of the constitution was Manuel Estrada Cabrera, who succeeded to the presidency in 1898 when the incumbent was assassinated. Like earlier dictators, Estrada Cabrera ruled the country by terror. In *The Five Republics of Central America*, published during the Estrada Cabrera regime, Dana G. Munro described the political atmosphere in Guatemala by noting that "it is dangerous to express an opinion on political matters even in private conversation. Much of the mail, and especially that coming from abroad, is opened and read in the post office." Munro, who traveled extensively through the country before writing his account, further stated that "persons who fall under suspicion are imprisoned or restricted in their liberty, or even mysteriously disappear. The ruthless execution of large numbers of persons, many of whom were probably innocent, have followed attempts to revolt or to assassinate the President."

After a committee of doctors appointed by the legislature in 1920 declared Estrada Cabrera mentally incompetent and deposed him, 11 years elapsed until the arrival of the next dictator on the scene. General Jorge Ubico was elected to the presidency in 1931 but, like so many of his predecessors, he decided to keep the office through extraconstitutional means. He relied on the army and police to maintain an oppressive regime that kept him in office until he was forced to resign in 1944 (see *The Ubico Dictatorship*, ch. 1). During his 13 years in office, he followed the traditional patterns of earlier despots by promoting public works, such as road and bridge building, and favored the entrepreneurial elite over the masses of working-class people. The role of the army was to keep the people in line. The collapse of a neighboring dictatorship in El Salvador in May 1944 spurred the already restive Guatemalans on to a general strike in June that brought about the resignation of Ubico, who turned over the reins of government to his friend General Juan Federico Ponce Vaides.

A surge of genuine political freedom gripped the country in the wake of Ubico's departure, giving rise to the formation of parties and the start of a campaign for the presidency. When the Ubico-appointed president gave signs that he intended to perpetuate himself in office, he was ousted by a coalition of various dissident factions, including students, intellectuals, workers, and young army officers. A revolutionary triumvirate of two officers—Major Francisco Javier Arana and Captain Jacobo Arbenz Guzmán—and a civilian, Jorge Toriello, ruled until the election and inauguration of the new president, Juan José Arévalo, a civilian professor and noted scholar in the field of education. Arévalo instituted economic and social reforms that incurred the enmity of the establishment elite, as well as elements of the military and foreign

investors, who accused him of accepting the support of indigenous communists (see *The Abortive Revolution*, ch. 1).

Arévalo was followed in the presidency by his minister of national defense, Colonel Arbenz, who was elected by a wide margin in his campaign for the top office. A cloud over this first so-called normal transfer of power in the history of independent Guatemala was the alleged implication of the new president in the earlier assassination of Colonel Arana, chief of the armed forces, who would undoubtedly have been Arbenz' main opponent for the presidency. Some historians who would like to picture Arbenz as a card-carrying communist make him responsible for the assassination; those at the other end of the spectrum proclaim his absolute innocence. The likelihood that the truth can ever be established seems remote (see *The Arévalo Presidency*, ch. 1).

As president, Arbenz went beyond the policies of his predecessor, accepting communist support and appointing communists to official positions. He allowed the communist party, the Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo—PGT), to register as a legal political party and permitted it to function without hindrance or harassment. He also promoted land reform, which brought about intense opposition from several sectors of the society, including much of the military establishment and the United Fruit Company, a United States corporation that dominated the banana industry throughout the world and was the largest landowner in Guatemala in addition to controlling the country's railroad and the port facilities at Puerto Barrios.

When Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas, a political and military rival of Arbenz, secured the backing of the United States Central Intelligence Agency (CIA) and in June 1954 led a small band of insurgents from exile in Honduras to challenge the government, the army repeated the role it had played 83 years earlier by refusing to support the sitting president. Arbenz was forced to resign, and Castillo Armas took over, wielding a new broom with which he vowed to sweep away the influences that he and his backers claimed were changing Guatemala into a communist state. To legitimize his presidency, Castillo Armas called for a plebiscite, which was then rigged to ensure the outcome; his term was cut short by an assassin in 1957.

After an abortive election to fill the vacant office of president in the fall of 1957, a special election in January 1958 resulted in victory for Miguel Ydígoras Fuentes, who seemed to be a throwback to an earlier era. An army general under Ubico, the new president appeared unable to adapt to the changed circumstances of the country and was continually forced to rely on martial law to counter the many public demonstrations against the prevailing economic conditions. In 1960, after a failed coup d'état, two young army officers formed the first of the several guerrilla groups that have plagued Guatemalan governments ever since. Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis Augusto Turcios Lima gained fame as guerrilla leaders, but they were only two among many young officers who rebelled against conditions that kept workers and peasants in poverty while corruption at the top levels of the government

and the military went unchecked. Ydígoras further angered many professional military officers by allowing the CIA to operate bases in Guatemala for the training of Cuban exiles in preparation for the attempt to overthrow Cuba's Fidel Castro at the Bay of Pigs. Even those officers who opposed Castro resented what they considered to be the relinquishment of Guatemalan sovereignty to the United States.

Elections scheduled for 1963 raised the possibility of a return of Arévalo to the presidency; to avoid that contingency, the minister of national defense, Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, seized power in yet another military coup d'état. Facing increased guerrilla activity, Peralta suspended the constitution and placed the country under martial law. Political assassinations, kidnappings, and bombings then became commonplace in Guatemala City, and the guerrillas remained active in their mountain strongholds in Izabal and Zacapa (see fig. 1). When Peralta restored constitutional government in late 1965 and permitted an electoral campaign for the presidency, the guerrillas were divided between those who wanted to give up their arms and participate in the electoral process and those who wanted to continue their irregular warfare. When several expatriates returned from Mexico to reenter Guatemalan politics, 26 of them were later rounded up and shot, thus giving notice that the purity of the political process would be guaranteed by the right-wing military.

When Mario Méndez Montenegro, a leading civilian contender for the presidency in 1966, was killed, his brother was drafted to run in his place and won easily (see *Development and Repression*, ch. 1). Julio César Méndez Montenegro became the only civilian president since Arévalo, taking his place in Guatemalan history among the very few civilians who have held the highest office. His inauguration might have been doubtful had he not signed a pact with the army high command to leave national security matters completely in the hands of the military; his administration will be remembered most for the violence of the antiguerrilla warfare in the eastern departments of the country. The campaign against the guerrillas was directed by Colonel (later General) Carlos Arana Osorio, who was referred to as the "Hero of Zacapa" by his supporters and the "Jackal of Zacapa" by his detractors. Regardless of sobriquet, Arana was credited with ending the guerrilla threat in the eastern departments at that time, and his fame as a military commander led to his election as president in 1970.

Brigadier General Kjell Eugenio Laugerud García succeeded Arana after the controversial election of 1974 and served a full term before turning over the government to the military hierarchy's chosen successor, Brigadier General Fernando Romeo Lucas García. The regime of President Lucas García was aptly described as "government by terror," but toward the end of his term he was ousted by a group of young officers who decried the corruption of the government and the army and opted for a change of players and scenario.

#### **The 1982 Coup d'Etat**

Lucas García had chosen Brigadier General Angel Aníbal Guevara as the candidate of the ruling clique for the March 1982 elections.





*Member of Presidential Guard Battalion  
at an entry to the National Palace, Guatemala City  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph*

Observers differed on whether the election was cleaner than those of 1974 and 1978 or whether it was equally fraudulent; but Guevara was the winner, as expected, and his inauguration was scheduled for July. About two weeks after the election, however, the incumbent and president elect were deposed in a coup d'etat engineered by several young officers who complained about the denigration of the armed forces by corrupt military-political officials.

It does not appear that the coup was a result of a long-established conspiracy or the product of long-term planning, although its implementation was swift and efficiently handled. It seems more probable that the dissident officers had simply reached a saturation point. They saw president-elect Guevara as another link in the chain of Arana, Laugerud, and Lucas García, whom they considered selfish, anti-democratic, and anti-Guatemalan, that is, antinationalistic. Among the complaints expressed by the dissidents was the claim that they and their comrades in arms were bearing the brunt of the constant anti-guerrilla warfare while senior officers made fortunes and lived well, far removed from the fighting. The prime example of the corrupt official was the general commander himself, Lucas García, who had acquired

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

huge landholdings during his incumbency (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4).

Early in the morning of March 23, 1982, heavily armed infantry troops, supported by artillery and tanks, surrounded the National Palace and other government buildings as military helicopters and fixed-wing aircraft circled the area. The small group of dissident army officers in charge of the coup deposed the president and took over the government without firing a shot. They seized and closed La Aurora International Airport to make sure that no help could be brought in for the discredited government. They took over radio stations and began broadcasting information and instructions to the public in order to keep the people from spreading false rumors that might cause disorder. The young officers then issued a communiqué stating that they had moved against the authorities because "a group of unscrupulous Guatemalans have continuously subjected the country to a political, economic and social crisis" and that the March 7 elections had been manipulated to perpetuate the wrongdoers in office.

Throughout the evening of March 23, the young officers continued to broadcast that the army was in full control and that Guatemalan citizens had no cause for worry. They stated in a communiqué to the nation that they had acted to overthrow the regime because it had ruled through terror and corruption, and they vowed that the new leadership would restore "a truly *de jure* regime." According to the Foreign Broadcast Information Service, a report heard in Guatemala City some time after 9:00 P.M. on March 23 indicated that the junta would consist of Ríos Montt, Colonel Víctor Manuel Argueta Villalta, Lieutenant Colonel Mario René Enríquez Morales, Major Angel Arturo Sánchez Gudiel, and Captain Carlos Rodolfo Muñoz Piloná. The latter four officers were members of the dissident group that engineered the coup and, at that time at least, evidently planned to become members of the ruling junta rather than remain in the background as later transpired. A broadcast heard just after midnight changed the roster, naming Maldonado Schaad and Gordillo to the junta with Ríos Montt. The four officers originally named, plus Captain Mario Augusto Rivas García of the air force and Second Lieutenant Héctor Mauricio López Bonilla, were the actual coup leaders who established themselves as the advisory council as the new government took shape. Colonel Argueta Villalta also became chief of the General Staff of the Presidency with Captain Muñoz Piloná as his assistant and Major Sánchez Gudiel as chief of intelligence, positions still held more than a year later.

In its first hours the junta suspended the constitution, dissolved the legislature, and announced that it would rule by decree. In one of its first decrees, stating that the "elections held on 7 March 1982 were plagued with anomalies, fraud and general manipulations," the junta annulled the election of General Guevara, thus leaving the presidency vacant. In his first broadcast to the nation, by way of explanation for the illegal overthrow of the government, Ríos Montt said, "eight years ago they rigged the elections, four years ago they did it again and there

was fraud again a few days ago." He pledged a new order, saying, "no longer will corpses be thrown by the roadside or piled into trucks," adding, however, that "we will shoot anyone who breaks the law." That bit of ambiguity inaugurated routine broadcasts and telecasts to the people that often left his listeners puzzled because of his convoluted style and vague wording.

### **The State of Siege**

At the end of the declared amnesty that was in effect during the entire month of June 1982, Ríos Montt, who had dissolved the junta and assumed the presidency, declared a state of siege (the first since 1970), which provided him with extraordinary powers as general commander of the armed forces. Included in the provisions of the declarations were the banning of all union and political activity, the setting aside of habeas corpus, the granting of arrest powers to the armed forces, and the rescission of the guarantees concerning the inviolability of homes and offices. Henceforth, homes, offices, and vehicles could be temporarily confiscated. In addition, the news media were forbidden to broadcast or print information concerning subversion or counter-subversion other than that provided by authorized public relations agencies. Travel was restricted, and private gatherings were banned unless permission had been secured from Minister of National Defense Ríos Montt. Business meetings were not affected by the decree.

Accompanying the state of siege declaration was a decree empowering the president to select judges for special courts that would hear cases against captured guerrillas and criminals. Ríos Montt said in a speech on July 2 that trials would be "just and open," but the exact opposite has been true. All trials of the special courts have been held in secret, even those that have imposed a death sentence. In the same speech the president announced a long list of crimes for which the death sentence would be handed down. The list included kidnapping, arson, hijacking, treason, piracy, and terrorism.

In a radio speech on July 3, Ríos Montt defended the imposition of the state of siege, stating that "we had 10 years without a state of siege but more than 150,000 people were lost." Loss of life during three decades had been terrible, but even the highest estimates paled beside the figure used by Ríos Montt; analysts were at a loss to explain the highly exaggerated figure or the reasons why the president used it. In the same speech he complained that the army and police forces were too small to meet the total threat and called on industrialists to protect their own installations. In his words, "You should go to the National Defense Ministry so that it can give you the necessary authorization so that you can take charge of the security of your own installations."

In one of his July speeches the president declared, "it is time to do what God orders." In his stated view, God had ordered a final battle against the guerrillas, and the state of siege would be a necessary implement to ensure the success of that battle. Having become a virtual dictator under its provisions, he renewed the state of siege every 30 days until March 1983. Questioned in December 1982 about the ne-

cessity for keeping it in force after he had declared the guerrilla war ended, the president said that low-level insurgent activity required it. The end of the state of siege coincided with the first anniversary of the coup d'état, but the secret courts continued in operation.

#### **Personnel**

Of the approximately 1.8 million Guatemalan males included in the 15- to 49-year age-group in 1981, almost 1.2 million were considered fit for military service. About 82,000 males reached age 18 annually, at which time they were considered eligible for conscription. Because of the numbers available, there has been no problem maintaining the desired strength. Women do not serve in the active armed forces. In the early 1980s there continued to be a quarterly call-up of conscripts, who usually served 30 months, their branch of service depending on their qualifications. Because more long-term personnel chose to stay in the armed forces during the 1970s and early 1980s, the number of conscripts called up annually dropped to perhaps only 5,000 to 6,000; almost certainly the bulk of these were assigned to infantry units.

The Fundamental Statute of Government requires that all male citizens "render military service in accordance with the law." Because only a fraction of those eligible are conscripted for service, most citizens escape fulfilling an obligation that has traditionally been looked on as onerous. In the past, including the recent past of the Lucas García regime, the burden of conscript service fell most heavily on the Indian population. Ladinos also served, but more often than not, except for the very poor, they escaped conscription through various exemptions and deferments. The conscription system, particularly as it has pertained to Indians, has been notoriously brutal; in most cases the unfortunates "chosen" to serve have been rounded up in the streets by press-gangs.

In the June 2, 1982, issue of the *Christian Century*, Donald T. Fox, referring to the army's relationship with the Indian population, said that "the army's method of conscription in the Indian territory has long been a problem. In order to fill the muster, the army sends trucks to pick up able-bodied men and brings them to training camps in the south—without notifying their families." An article in *America* of October 30, 1982, by Edward and Donna W. Brett, in referring to the draft system, states that "the government, to meet its quota of conscripts, often rounds up Indian boys who happen to be on the streets, forcing them into the army." The students caught in these dragnets were in grades seven to 12, indicating that the military was interested in numbers rather than the age or maturity of the prospective soldiers. Nevertheless, if their teachers protested to the local military authorities, the students were usually released. An anthropologist visiting Quiché in March 1983 talked to two soldiers who claimed to be 13 and 14 years old. The system hardly seems designed to engender good feelings in the new soldiers or in the Indian population as a whole.

The system that remained in effect in mid-1983 provided that conscripts were called up four times a year. The selection process and the

administering of physical examinations were supervised by the commander of the reserves in each department. Conscripts were sent to recruit training centers where they received basic military training, weapons familiarization, and physical fitness drills. Another important aspect of the training at this stage was instruction in the Spanish language given to most Indian conscripts who know only their own languages and also to illiterate ladinos. Language instruction was continued by the Army Literacy Department after conscripts had been assigned to units (see Training, this ch.).

As is true of some other Latin American armed forces, references to "the military" more often than not pertain to the officer corps; very little information is published concerning enlisted personnel. Actually, the Guatemalan officer corps had traditionally limited the importance of noncommissioned officers (NCOs), fearing the possible establishment of a rival power base. Reenlistments were held to a minimum, pay was niggardly, and promotions were rare. Few NCOs progressed beyond the rank of corporal. As weapons and equipment advanced in complexity and counterinsurgency operations continued, the need for NCOs became greater, and the officers were forced to change the system. Reenlistments were then encouraged (particularly among ladino conscripts), pay scales were raised to become competitive with civilian jobs, and other perquisites were offered to retain qualified personnel.

A strong sense of loyalty and camaraderie has developed among graduates of the military academy, the Escuela Politécnica (Polytechnical School), the officer corps has developed its professionalism over the years, but it has not become apolitical—indeed the very idea of an apolitical officer corps would probably be alien to its members. Officers consider the corps to be elite, that is, one of the educated and politically aware segments of society, and as such they consider entry into the political arena to be a natural function of someone of their status. The young officers who overthrew the Lucas García regime no doubt considered that they would have been derelict in their duties if they had not stepped in to end the corruption and chaos that they perceived in the government and the military.

The corporate identity of the officer corps has been enhanced (particularly in the years since the military academy has been awarding most commissions) by the institutions known as the *promoción* (literally, promotion; in this context, "graduating class") and the *centenario* (centenary), pertaining to the number assigned to each graduate. During the four years of study, those who make it through to graduation, that is, members of the *promoción*, establish strong bonds of loyalty to each other that they maintain after graduation and renew through frequent meetings and reunions throughout their careers. The *centenario* is an institution through which experienced officers assume a responsibility for those just entering active duty. Graduate number 358, for example, who may be a captain, has been looked after by number 258, perhaps a lieutenant colonel, and both will be on hand

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

to welcome second lieutenant 458 when he enters active duty. The *promoción* and the *centenario*, respectively, provide horizontal and vertical bonds for all graduates of the academy (see The Dominant Role of the Army, ch. 4).

Another peculiar category into which some officers are placed is called *disponible* (literally, "disposable" or "free"). Senior officers who lack sufficient longevity for retirement but for one reason or another, usually political, have not been given an army assignment are classified as *disponible*. They remain on army rolls and continue to receive basic pay but have no duties. In effect, it is a system by which the powerful old-boy network created by the *promoción* and the *centenario* takes care of its own—even those who have fallen into disfavor.

#### **Foreign Military Influence**

Spanish officers assisted the Guatemalans in establishing the Escuela Politécnica in 1873. Around the turn of the century, French officers were assigned as advisers to the Guatemalans on the organization and training of their army. The French also aided in the establishment of the air arm in the post-World War I period. During the long military dictatorship of Ubico, however, American officers became the principal advisers to the Guatemalan forces, and at Ubico's request the United States government sent officers to command the Escuela Politécnica. Major John Considine was detailed to the post of commandant of the academy in the early 1930s and was succeeded by other American officers during most of the remainder of the decade. The ties between the military establishments of the two countries were strengthened during World War II.

Guatemala and the United States were signatories to the Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance (the Rio Treaty) in 1947, and for the next three decades a close military relationship existed between the two countries. American military personnel were assigned as advisers to the Guatemalan forces, which were armed with American weapons and used American military equipment almost exclusively. Guatemalan officers and NCOs regularly attended service schools in the United States and Panama under the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program funded by the United States.

In the mid-1960s, as the insurgency became more intense, the government reacted by building up its antiguerrilla forces and asking for additional United States aid and advisers. A controversy arose when the opposition claimed that United States Army Special Forces (Green Berets) were present in Guatemala not only as advisers but also as combat soldiers participating in the fighting against the insurgents. Some American reporters on the scene substantiated the claim that Green Berets were in the country, but official sources stated that the number was very small and that they were forbidden to enter combat zones with their advisees. The presence of the Green Berets, whatever their number and role, provided the insurgents with powerful anti-United States propaganda, but the propaganda coup did not save the insurgents from defeat at the hands of government forces at that time.

Defeated in one area at one particular time, the insurgents have repeatedly regained enough strength to renew the attack against the government, necessitating ever-increasing expenditures and the constant need for military assistance.

Guatemala's military expenditures (in current United States dollars) increased from US\$9.3 million in 1963 to US\$61 million in 1979. In percentage of gross national product (GNP) for those years, the figures were 0.74 percent and 0.9 percent, respectively; but in some years the percentage was considerably higher, as in 1970 and 1977 when the figures were 1.6 percent and 1.4 percent, respectively. The estimated military budget for 1983 was US\$142.5 million, which was reportedly 62 percent above the previous year. The size of the armed forces rose from 9,000 officers and men in 1963 to 14,000 in 1979, and the total strength had risen to 29,000 in early 1983.

Since World War II the United States had been by far the largest supplier of armaments to Guatemala (see table 11, Appendix). In the late 1970s purchases of Israeli small arms, aircraft, and some other military items, as well as accompanying Israeli advisers, had introduced another foreign influence to the Guatemalan forces. By the early 1980s Israel was the country's largest supplier of infantry weapons and military communications equipment. Nevertheless, United States influence continued to dominate despite the chilled relationship of the 1977-81 period (see *The United States*, ch. 4).

Direct American assistance and advice to the Guatemalan forces ended during the administration of President Jimmy Carter, which criticized the dismal civil rights record of successive military governments. The indignant Laugerud regime then rejected further aid. A small amount of American supplies and equipment continued to arrive in Guatemala during the period of the embargo because of contracts that had not been fulfilled before the ban and also because some items, such as jeeps, trucks, and helicopters, were classified as civilian rather than military equipment. The Guatemalans converted them immediately to military use, and their military helicopter fleet grew from nine in 1980 to 29 in 1983, although no military helicopters or gunships had been acquired.

At the end of 1982, after a Latin American trip by President Ronald Reagan, the official United States attitude began to change despite continued opposition in the United States Congress to renewing United States military aid to Guatemala. This opposition was based on alleged violations of human rights. Reagan, however, had conferred with Ríos Montt, among other Central American leaders, and decided to authorize the sale of US\$6.4 million in helicopter spare parts and other nonlethal military equipment. The decision was criticized by the British government because of its position as guarantor of territorial integrity to Belize, the former British colony; Guatemala claims a large portion of Belize (see *Latin America*, ch. 4). The Guatemalan government, however, declared that it lacked the foreign exchange required to purchase the military equipment.

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

From 1950 through 1977 almost 3,400 students attended courses at service schools in the United States and Panama. During the 1950s and 1960s about 115 Guatemalan students received such training annually, but during the 1970s that number had increased to about 140. From 1978 through 1982 no Guatemalan officers or NCOs were trained under IMET, but some training was resumed on a small scale in late 1982.

### **Administration, Organization and Training**

The president is "general commander" of the armed forces. This was true under the previous constitution and remained true under the Fundamental Statute after the March 1982 coup. The Ministry of National Defense is the agency through which the president directs the armed forces. Brigadier General Mejía Victores continued to head that ministry in mid-1983.

In addition to routine administrative staff, the defense ministry includes the General Staff of the Army, five secretariats (one for each service, plus security and industry), military commands, military services, auxiliary military services, and centers of military education and instruction. The minister, always a senior army officer, has traditionally wielded a great deal of power in the government structure. Mejía Victores has carried on that tradition as a member of the Ríos Montt cabinet. Another position with inherent power is that of the chief of staff of the Ministry of National Defense (formerly the chief of the General Staff of the Army), held in mid-1983 by Brigadier General Héctor Mario López Fuentes.

The organization, missions, and functions of the armed forces have been established by law and were not altered by the coup. The organization has evolved to fit the needs of a military force that has been engaged in counterinsurgency operations since the early 1960s. The military establishment comprised the active-duty (regular) force and the reserve. The regular force in early 1983 included combat branches—infantry, artillery, cavalry, engineers, air force, and navy—and technical support—military police, medical, and ordnance, among others. Despite the inclusion of the air and naval forces, which have considerable autonomy, the overall armed forces are usually referred to as the army. The organized reserve consists primarily of recent discharges. Older prior-service personnel are considered inactive reservists.

### **Army**

The army is the senior service and dwarfs the navy and air force in size and importance. Total army strength in early 1983 was estimated at 27,000 out of about 29,000 for the overall armed forces. An unconfirmed estimate placed army conscript strength at 10,000 to 12,000. The principal combat units consisted of 27 infantry battalions, two paratroop battalions, one engineer battalion, 12 artillery mortar batteries, and the Presidential Guard Battalion. A battalion was smaller in size and had less firepower than its United States counterpart. The



combat forces were supported by the usual service units, such as medical, military police, and ordnance.

The army was equipped with about 10 United States M-41 tanks of Korean War vintage armed with 76mm guns. Seven of the older and lighter Stuart tanks—M-3A1s—mounting 37mm guns, were also in inventory. A variety of armored cars and armored personnel carriers (APCs) rounded out the armored vehicle holdings. Some dated to the World War II era, but a few of later design included 10 M-113 APCs and seven V-150 Commando APCs. Eighteen 75mm howitzers and 54 105mm howitzers provided artillery support, and a variety of mortars also contributed additional firepower.

For territorial control the army in March 1983 divided the country into 22 military zones, each generally comprising one of the 22 administrative departments (less the department of Petén). Zone commanders were presidential appointees, selected from the senior officers of the combat branches. The 22 zones plus Petén (which was designated as a brigade), were the major territorial commands of the army, controlling reserve affairs as well as the regular armed forces. The commanders also functioned as governmental administrators in their respective areas. In effect, the political chain of command goes from the central government through the military zone commanders to the departmental governors (see Local Government, ch. 4).

#### **Air Force**

The Guatemalan Air Force (*Fuerza Aérea Guatemalteca*), commanded in early 1983 by Colonel Fernando Castillo Ramírez, had a total strength of about 650 officers, NCOs, and airmen (plus an attached infantry "tactical security group" battalion). In the overall Guatemalan defense structure, the air force is part of the army. Despite its size and subordination, however, it is generally considered as a separate force, and Colonel Castillo operated from a separate headquarters located at La Aurora Air Base colocated with the international airport in Guatemala City.

Established as the Military Aeronautical Corps in the late 1920s, the air force began with a few World War I French aircraft and a small French advisory mission to assist with organization, training, and maintenance. The small air arm of the army acquired its first real combat capability after World War II when a few surplus P-51 Mustangs were transferred from the United States Army Air Forces. Its principal fixed-wing combat aircraft in 1983 consisted of 10 Cessna A-37Bs, all assigned to the fighter squadron. The remaining aircraft in inventory consisted of a variety of trainers, transports, utility planes, and helicopters (see table 12, Appendix).

The air force deployed seven squadrons: ground support, reconnaissance, maintenance, training, and helicopter, and two transport. In addition to La Aurora, there were air bases located at Santa Elena (Flores), Puerto Barrios, and San José. Although there had been frequent reports asserting that the government intended to modernize the aging fleet of A-37Bs, no move to acquire new fighters had been

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

made, probably because of the cost involved. As of mid-April 1983 the government had not purchased the helicopter spare parts that the United States had made available after lifting the long embargo.

### **Navy**

The navy, established in 1959, is the junior service, created primarily for antismuggling operations and the prevention of incursions into Guatemalan waters by foreign fishing vessels. The navy is in fact the country's coast guard and does not have oceangoing responsibilities or capabilities. Under the command of Captain Francisco Torres Chegüen in early 1983, its strength was estimated at 960, which included 660 marines. The size of the marine contingent had approximately doubled during the early 1980s, probably for counterinsurgency purposes, although commitment of marines to the antiguerrilla war had not been publicized. Naval bases were located at Santo Tomás de Castilla near Puerto Barrios on the Caribbean Sea and at San José on the Pacific coast in the department of Escuintla.

The newest ship in the navy in 1983 was a hydrographic vessel, built by Halter Marine Services of Louisiana and commissioned in 1981. Other craft included one Broadsword-class coastal patrol craft built by Halter Marine in 1976; five Cutlass-class coastal patrol craft also from Halter Marine, three built in 1971 and two in 1976; two patrol boats (the *Utatlán*, commissioned in 1967 and the *Osorio Saravia*, commissioned in 1972) built for Guatemala by Sewart Seacraft of Louisiana and delivered under the provisions of the United States Military Assistance Program (MAP); one older coastal boat, the *Hunahpú*, built for the United States Coast Guard in 1942 and transferred to the Guatemalan Navy in 1965; two other ex-United States Coast Guard utility craft; two small troop carriers for marines built by Halter Marine and commissioned in 1976; and one ex-United States Navy landing craft acquired by Guatemala in 1966.

The Broadsword-class boat carried five officers and 15 crewmen and mounted two 75mm recoilless rifles, four 50-caliber machine guns, and two 20mm antiaircraft guns. The smaller Cutlass craft carried one officer and six crewmen and mounted one 75mm recoilless rifle, one 20mm antiaircraft gun, and two 50-caliber machine guns.

### **Training**

Conscripts spend the first 12 weeks of their military tour undergoing training in their assigned military zone. Although emphasis is placed on basic military training, physical education, and weapons familiarization, another important part of a recruit's training is language instruction. Most Indian conscripts are unable to speak Spanish when drafted, and many ladino conscripts can neither read nor write. Literacy training continues after the recruits finish basic training. Literate recruits are always in great demand for placement in units where they usually receive on-the-job technical training. More advanced technical schooling has generally been reserved for personnel willing to volunteer for terms of service beyond the ordinary conscript tour.



*Post Office, Guatemala City  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph*

From the end of World War II until the late 1970s, United States military personnel were regularly assigned to Guatemala in advisory positions. The standardization of equipment through the United States MAP and the presence of American advisers simplified the training tasks. After the chilling of relations between Guatemala and the United States in 1977 and the departure of the American advisers, Israeli advisers arrived in the country to familiarize the Guatemalan forces with Israeli weapons and to assist in training. Some of those advisers remained in early 1983.

Until 1977 many Guatemalan officers and some NCOs attended courses at various service schools in the United States, and others attended the United States Army School of the Americas in Panama. A few Guatemalan officers also attended courses in Mexico, Italy, the Federal Republic of Germany (West Germany), Colombia, Uruguay, Argentina, and France. In-country training for officers was limited to the combat arms courses taught at the Center for Military Studies (Centro de Estudios Militares), to which officers returned at irregular intervals for review and refresher training.

After the Escuela Politécnica became the primary source of commissions, appointments directly from civilian life or the infrequent

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

instances of soldiers rising through the ranks became rare happenings compared with earlier times. Those officers, known as *de línea* (from the line), sometimes constituted a powerful element, but in the post-World War II era most commissions have been awarded to academy graduates, known as *graduados* to distinguish them from *de línea*.

The Escuela Politécnica was founded in 1873 during the regime of General Barrios, who thought of it as one of the important steps in his plan to professionalize the officer corps. Admission to the academy has been highly prized by the 14- and 15-year-old boys who win selection through competitive examinations. The cadets, primarily from middle-class families, recognize that academic success will be rewarded with a diploma in science and letters and a commission in the army. Although some graduates gain admission to the national university on the strength of their diplomas, they are still obligated to a tour of duty in the army. For most graduates, two years' duty in infantry units is the usual routine after which they may request transfer to other army branches or to the air force or navy.

### **Uniforms, Ranks, and Insignia**

The most commonly seen uniforms in Guatemala in the late 1970s and early 1980s were the army camouflage field uniforms. Even the three-man junta (generals Ríos Montt and Maldonado Schaad and Colonel Gordillo) appeared in official photographs in camouflage uniforms in stark contrast to the splendor of the dress blues worn by former generals-turned-presidents. In addition to field uniforms, the three services used a variety of uniforms for routine duties, shipboard duties, and parades. Colors are the familiar army green, navy blue, air force blue, and khaki.

Officer ranks corresponded closely to United States ranks except that the Guatemalans had two grades equivalent to the United States army and air force captain and the navy full lieutenant. In addition, they had only two general officer (admiral) grades. For several years colonel was the highest rank attainable. After the expulsions of Ubico and Ponce in 1944, all Guatemalan generals (about 80) went into exile, and promotions to general officer ceased until 1968.

Naval officers wore rank insignia on the lower sleeve of coats or on collars when shirts were worn as outer garments. Army and air force officers wore collar insignia or shoulder boards depending on uniform. Insignia of rank were the same, but shoulder board colors were light gray for the army and light blue for the air force. Generals wore red shoulder boards (see fig. 7).

### **Public Order and Internal Security**

The endemic violence in Guatemala for the three decades from the early 1950s to the early 1980s often made a shambles of public order and threatened the internal security of the country. This is not to imply that for every day of the 30-year period the country was engulfed in civil war or that all of its citizens lived on the edge of strife during that time. But warfare, terrorism, crime, and discord did occur on a scale

ARMY AND AIR FORCE	Subteniente	Teniente	Capitán Segundo	Capitán Primero	Mayor	Teniente Coronel	Coronel	General de Brigada	General de División
	Second Lieutenant	Lieutenant	Captain		Major	Lieutenant Colonel	Colonel	Brigadier General	Major General
NAVY	Alférez de Fragata	Alférez de Navio	Teniente de Fragata	Teniente de Navio	Capitán de Corbeta	Capitán de Fragata	Capitán de Navio	Contralmirante	Vicealmirante
	Ensign	Lieutenant Junior Grade	Lieutenant		Lieutenant Commander	Commander	Captain	Commodore	Rear Admiral

NOTE: Insignia for the rank of teniente de fragata is not known

Figure 7. Insignia of Officers' Ranks, July 1982

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

that exacted a horrible toll in lives and property. In a setting of great wealth for a few and extreme poverty for the many, the endless insurgency, counterinsurgency, and vigilantism resulted in an appalling number of deaths even if the lowest estimates are accepted. The opposing forces suffered casualties in combat, but those casualties paled to insignificance when compared with the number of innocent non-combatants who were killed indiscriminately during the 30-year period, primarily by government forces or by government-condoned paramilitary groups and death squads.

#### **Law Enforcement**

After the March 1982 coup the junta set aside the country's constitution, disbanded the legislature, and forbade activities by political parties (see Constitutional Basis, ch. 4). About a month later the Fundamental Statute of Government was promulgated, providing the new junta with a basis in law, but that was set aside in June when Ríos Montt disbanded the junta and assumed the presidency. His proclamation of a state of siege on July 1, 1982, in effect gave him dictatorial powers. One of the most controversial acts accompanying the state of siege was the establishment of special courts that conducted secret trials of political offenders as well as ordinary criminals and that were empowered to issue death sentences.

On the first anniversary of the coup the state of siege was lifted, but the activities of the special courts were not curtailed. Five more men were executed on March 21, bringing the total to 15 for the less than nine months that the courts had been operating. The five prisoners, executed by firing squad in Guatemala City's main cemetery, had been convicted of murder, attempted murder, kidnapping, rape, aggravated theft, and "violent immoral abuse." They were said to have been members of a gang (two soldiers among them) that preyed on well-to-do families, gaining entrance to houses using army uniforms and legitimate credentials and then subjecting the victims to beatings and sexual abuse before stealing their valuables and sometimes murdering them. This official account depicted actual criminal activities as opposed to the vague accusations against those executed earlier.

The responsibility for guaranteeing public order and enforcing the law as directed by the basic statutes of the country belongs to the National Police (Policía Nacional), but the degree of control exercised by police authorities varies according to custom and conditions. Custom is part of the equation because, in effect, there are two Guatemalas, one Indian and one ladino, and in matters of law enforcement and public order it has been customary for the Indians to police themselves in their own communities in regard to ordinary crimes and misdemeanors. The conditions that affect basic law enforcement are those dictated by the incessant civil war. Frequent states of siege declared by several presidents have also had a bearing on law enforcement because of the imposition of martial law and the suspension of civil rights during those periods. Whether or not a state of siege happened

to be in effect, however, the army traditionally has been heavily involved in police matters.

In early 1983 the law enforcement agencies included the National Police, Treasury Police (*Guardia de Hacienda*), and the Mobile Military Police (*Policía Militar Ambulante—PMA*). A specially trained (counterinsurgency) unit of the army called the *Kaibiles* (a Mayan term, loosely translated as strategists) and army intelligence personnel, called G2, have for many years performed police functions. During the Ríos Montt state of siege, all armed forces were given the power of arrest, including the authority to hold arrestees without bringing charges or permitting writs of habeas corpus. In addition, many private enterprises employed their own security forces. Wealthy individuals hired bodyguards or security guards to protect themselves, their families, and their property. Frequently, the responsibilities and functioning of the National Police, Treasury Police, PMA, and the many pseudopolic forces appeared to overlap.

During colonial times and the first years of independence, the army was responsible for police functions, but that system was finally recognized as unsuitable, and constables (*comisarios de policía*) were appointed by city officials to safeguard the peace. The constables of Guatemala City became the Urban Police or Watch Corps in the late 1860s. In 1872 the Civil Guard was established as the first regular police force, and somewhat later President Barrios hired a former New York City policeman, Joseph H. Pratt, to be assistant director of the force and to professionalize it. At first stationed only in the capital, the Civil Guard eventually acquired nationwide responsibilities and by the 1950s had become known as the National Police. The bulk of its strength, even in the early 1980s, continued to be deployed in Guatemala City, where more than one-fifth of the population was concentrated.

The entire police effort changed noticeably during the 1960s as a result of the escalating insurgency and counterinsurgency. When the surviving guerrillas moved into Guatemala City after defeat in the eastern departments, the National Police was not prepared for the surge in guerrilla activities in the capital. There had been urban guerrilla activities for several years, but always on a scale that could be handled. When the guerrillas from the hills joined those in the city, however, the police were temporarily overwhelmed. The situation changed from 1967 to 1970 as police strength was increased, training improved, and weapons and equipment became available. The changes were attributable primarily to United States assistance. The Agency for International Development (AID) moved in with substantial funds for the National Police, established a police training academy, and sent policemen to Washington to attend courses at the International Police Academy. In three years the AID efforts transformed the National Police into an effective counterinsurgency force.

The General Directorate of National Police in Guatemala City operated under the direction of the Ministry of Government, which handled the functions usually associated with a ministry or department

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

of interior, and some writers use that designation. News reports in early 1983 stated that a transfer of police supervision to the Ministry of National Defense was imminent, but an official announcement of that transfer had not been made as of mid-1983. The National Police, a nationwide force of armed policemen, is usually described by outside observers as a paramilitary organization. Its membership in early 1983, estimated at 9,500, consisted primarily of uniformed policemen but also included an investigative agency of plainclothes detectives. The general director of the National Police in early 1983 was Colonel Hernán Ponce Nitch, a Ríos Montt appointee.

Basic policemen entered the force, after training, as agents; the progression in position was from agent to subinspector, inspector, chief inspector, deputy section commander, section commander, deputy corps commander, and corps commander. Rank titles for commanders were the same as in the army, i.e., major, lieutenant colonel, colonel. The director general and, frequently, other senior officers were detailed from the army.

The former Detective Corps (*Cuerpo de Detectives*) of the National Police—also frequently called judicial police (*judiciales*) or simply the secret police—acquired a particularly unsavory reputation during the years of counterinsurgency because of its disregard for civil and human rights and reports of the use of torture during interrogations. Within days of the 1982 coup d'état, the investigators themselves were subjected to investigation. Referred to by the new government as "the main factor of repression" in preceding regimes, the corps experienced a wave of resignations as detectives were accused of irregular-cum-criminal activities. Before the end of the first month in office, the junta disbanded the Detective Corps and in its place established the Technical Investigation Department (*Departamento de Investigaciones Técnicas—DIT*). Designed to eliminate some of the worst abuses (and abusers) of the police authority, the reorganization was criticized as being a mere cosmetic change, and at the end of its first year the DIT was reportedly undergoing a purge aimed at ridding the organization of several high-ranking officers.

At the same time that the new detective agency was established, the National Police also organized the Special Operations Command, which was designed especially for counter guerrilla activities. The command established its headquarters in Guatemala City, but its commanding officer, an army major, indicated that it or its subunits could be deployed to any department. For the city the new unit was in effect a special weapons attack team (SWAT), and for the countryside it provided lightly armed, rapid strike forces.

The Treasury Police, established in 1954 and formerly supervised by treasury officials, was directed in early 1983 by the Ministry of Government, and at that time there was no indication that supervision would be transferred. Treasury Police units of varying strength were assigned in the capital cities of the 22 departments, at various border-crossing points, and at airports. The Treasury Police, although pri-



marily concerned with customs and tariffs, was also involved in anti-smuggling and anticounterfeiting activities, regulation of immigration and emigration and the issuance of passports, enforcement of laws concerning the manufacture and sale of alcoholic beverages, and enforcement of narcotics laws.

Treasury Police agents also have been involved in counterinsurgency operations when their routine duties have brought them in contact with guerrilla forces in border areas. The organization regularly operates in conjunction with other police and security forces by reporting suspicious movements or activities and, when necessary, supplements other forces in counterinsurgency actions. Because of its relatively small size—about 2,100 agents in 1982—and its widely dispersed sites, the Treasury Police did not constitute a major counterinsurgency force, but its agents were frequently involved as individuals or in small units.

The PMA was formed in the early 1960s to act as a strike force against increasing banditry and increasing guerrilla activity, particularly in remote areas where National Police coverage was thin or nonexistent. The PMA grew as insurgency increased. When the insurgents moved into the capital and other urban areas, the PMA followed; its strength was increased to accommodate its new responsibilities. The strength of the PMA in mid-1983 was estimated at 3,000 officers and men.

### **Crime and Punishment**

#### ***Incidence of Crime***

Crime and criminal violence exist in Guatemala as elsewhere in the world and, as in any other country, local conditions have a bearing on the incidence and classification of criminal activities. In Guatemala, for example, the existence of the two communities—Indian and ladino—colocated but unassimilated, and the coexistence of extreme wealth and extreme poverty has affected the national mores. Official statistics on crime and criminals have not been considered reliable in the past and, since the advent of secret trials, assessing the incidence of crime has been made more difficult. Differentiating between ordinary crime and politically motivated crime has become almost impossible.

The latest statistics on crime available in early 1983 pertained to the year 1978 and, without footnotes or explanations of any kind, the bare figures were not particularly enlightening. There were no breakdowns according to whether the accused were male or female, recidivist or first-timers, adults or juveniles. The statistics were broken down according to department and, as might be expected, the department of Guatemala led the list with a total of 5,226 crimes reported; but the runner-up was Chiquimula with 5,155. Why Chiquimula, which had only about one-sixth the population of Guatemala, ranked so high in crime statistics was unexplained. Escuintla was listed as having had 4,250 crimes for the year, and Quezaltenango, 3,065. No other department reached the 2,000 mark. The most common criminal activities listed in the statistics were crimes against the person and crimes against property.

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

### **Penal System**

Supervision of the country's prisons is a function of the director of prisons under the overall direction of the minister of government. The main penitentiary for men in 1983 was the Pavón Penal Farm (Granja Penal de Pavón), located near Guatemala City. There were two other major prisons for men, one in Escuintla and the other in Quezaltenango. The main women's prison, Santa Teresa, was located in Guatemala City, as was the central facility for juvenile delinquents. Each department had smaller prison facilities for men and women.

Jails in towns and larger villages were usually under the control of units of the National Police or a local justice of the peace. Rural Indian communities frequently maintained jail facilities where they administered to their own malefactors rather than hand them over to the police. Large farms or ranches (*fincas*) also maintained lockup facilities where lawbreakers could be held until picked up by regular police. According to law, those being held awaiting trial could not be incarcerated with convicted criminals.

According to Ann Goetting, a professor of sociology writing in the *Prison Journal*, Pavón prison, which she visited in 1980, was crowded and drab, but within its confines prisoners enjoyed much more freedom of movement than was generally true of prisons in the United States. Families were allowed long visiting hours daily, and facilities were provided for conjugal visits. Transportation by bus from Guatemala City to the prison was provided, and there was a schoolhouse and playground for children of inmates. Prisoners and visiting spouses engaged in handicrafts, the products of which were sold within the prison and on the outside to earn money for family upkeep. Santa Teresa was operated by nuns, and although more modern and less crowded, it was more like a conventional prison insofar as an atmosphere of discipline was concerned, and no conjugal visits were allowed.

### **Threats to Internal Security**

#### **Background to Civil Strife**

Most historians and political scientists writing in English about Guatemalan affairs in the three decades since the overthrow of President Arbenz peg the start of the country's civil strife to that event. Others, of course, differ, dating the start of the violence earlier—the Arana assassination in 1949—or later, the outbreak of guerrilla warfare in the 1960s. Political bias is often the determining factor. Much has been written about the communist threat present during the Arbenz era; that threat was real and cannot be dismissed out of hand. Nevertheless, many observers with the benefit of hindsight have agreed that a multitude of social problems posed a far graver danger to the country in 1954 than did the communists and that the problems faced in fact provided the opening for the communists.

To some Guatemalans, as well as some outsiders aware of Guatemalan affairs, Arbenz was an out-and-out communist who deserved the fate that befell him. To others he was a benefactor, a reformer who was trying to do something to break down the country's grossly inequitable



*Tourist market, San Antonio Aguas Calientes*



*Residents in San Antonio Aguas Calientes  
Courtesy James D. Rudolph*

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

economic system and to right some of its many social wrongs. Wherever he should be placed between the extremes, Arbenz nevertheless was the legally elected president; he was overthrown when the army withheld its support and a ragtag army that had been formed by, and was operating with, the assistance of the United States was able to enter Guatemala City unopposed.

To his supporters, generally the propertied classes, Colonel Carlos Castillo Armas was a liberator who rid the country of the communist threat represented by Arbenz. To his opponents, generally poor peasants and laborers, he was a tyrant who reversed the social and economic programs that had benefited the working people. The new president was accused of using his security forces to purge the government of even the most minor officials and petty bureaucrats of the previous regime and to harass and frighten any leftist sympathizers. The campaign continued under the guise of uncovering communists and, before falling to an assassin's bullets in 1957, Castillo Armas had set the dangerous precedent of pinning the communist label on anyone who opposed him or who engaged in even mild criticism of the government.

The remainder of the 1950s witnessed dissension by peasants and workers who resented the reversal of the reforms put in place by Arévalo and Arbenz. Land was returned to the rich landowners, the constitution of 1945 was replaced, leftist political parties were outlawed, and poverty continued to be the reality of the present and the outlook for the future for most Guatemalans (see Constitutional Basis, ch. 4). Corruption at high levels became commonplace, a situation to which Castillo Armas was said to be blind. Nevertheless, the dissension did not coalesce into insurrection until early in the next decade under the presidency of Ydígoras. When open insurrection did occur, however, it was perpetrated by dissident army officers rather than by the peasants and workers who had been causing minor disturbances for several years. Ydígoras, himself a former army general, made the mistake of ignoring the inherent nationalism of the officer corps. Some officers also took offense because Ydígoras granted permission to the CIA to establish bases in rural Guatemala for the training of anti-Castro Cubans.

Many of the officers could not have cared less about Castro, but they concluded that Guatemalan sovereignty was again being compromised by the CIA, which only six years earlier had been instrumental in the overthrow of Arbenz. Announcing that they intended to end corruption in the army and the government and to erase the strain on national honor caused by Ydígoras' "becoming a puppet of the United States," the dissident officers attempted a coup d'état on November 13, 1960. The rebels achieved some early successes, capturing army bases in Guatemala City and Zacapa and taking control of the port of Puerto Barrios. Faced with the possible collapse of the Bay of Pigs preparations in Guatemala, President Dwight D. Eisenhower dispatched United States warships to Guatemalan waters to discourage the rebels, whose newly won bases were already undergoing bombing attacks by aircraft

flown by Cubans of the exile force. Lacking the necessary depth to carry on the revolt, the insurgent officers sought sanctuary in exile in neighboring countries.

Two young rebel lieutenants, Marco Antonio Yon Sosa and Luis Augusto Turcios Lima, returned clandestinely from exile and began organizing other army deserters and peasants for guerrilla activities. At the time Yon Sosa was 22 years old and Turcios Lima, 19. Both were graduates of the Escuela Politécnica, and both had received training at United States service schools. Yon Sosa had attended courses in counter guerrilla warfare at Fort Gulick in Panama, and Turcios Lima had completed ranger training at Fort Benning, Georgia. Guerrilla actions started in February 1962 with attacks on army posts in the department of Izabal. The guerrilla leaders at that time evidently thought of their effort as a temporary movement, the goal of which was the rapid overthrow of the government. The tactics were to be much the same as in November 1960, that is, attacks on military posts through which they expected to gain support and undermine the oligarchy. They called their organization the Revolutionary Movement Alejandro de León-November 13 (better known as MR-13) in double commemoration of a companion who had been captured and shot and of the date of their abortive coup attempt.

In March a second guerrilla movement, calling itself the October 20th Front in commemoration of the 1944 revolution, became active in the same general area. In Guatemala City demonstrations, riots, and strikes shook the authorities and forced Ydígoras to call up army reserves to restore order. The president also took the opportunity afforded by disorder to reorganize his cabinet, placing military officers in every position but the foreign ministry. The government then put forth a powerful response to the guerrillas, practically destroying the movement and sending the survivors reeling back to the mountains and forests to treat their wounded and find replacements for their dead. MR-13 began negotiations with the Guatemalan Labor Party (Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo—PGT), as the communist party was known, and a student group known as the 12 April Movement to form the Rebel Armed Forces (Fuerzas Armadas Rebeldes—FAR), which was to be the planning and coordinating center for the various guerrilla groups.

The alliance between the guerrillas and the PGT was frequently stormy, not only because of differing ideas on tactics but also because of personality clashes. Despite inherent differences between many of the officers-turned-guerrillas and their new communist allies, all opposition forces were branded "communist" by Guatemala's leaders. For reasons never satisfactorily explained, as presidential elections approached in 1963, Ydígoras allowed Arévalo to return from Mexico, and the former president quickly became a likely prospect for another term in office if a fair election were allowed. To forestall that prospect, the right wing in the person of Colonel Enrique Peralta Azurdia, the defense minister, deposed Ydígoras and took over the government.

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

The Peralta coup convinced the guerrilla leaders that their way, i.e., fighting, was the only way to restore the government to the governed, as they claimed had existed from 1944 until 1954. They also acknowledged that a quick victory was not within their grasp, and they began to think of their insurgency as a long-term movement.

In a most unusual move for a military dictator, Peralta permitted elections in 1966 and handed the government over to the winner, Julio César Méndez Montenegro, a civilian. In order to accede to the presidency, Méndez Montenegro was forced to give the army a free hand in national security affairs; the army then began planning a campaign to wipe out the guerrillas. Securing United States military aid and Green Beret advisers, Colonel Carlos Arana Osorio trained several companies in antiguerrilla warfare from July until November 1966, then moved into Zacapa and Izabal in pursuit of the Alejandro de León Front led by Yon Sosa and the Edgar Ibarra Front led by César Montes, who had replaced Turcios Lima. The death of the latter in an automobile accident in September had been a devastating blow to the movement, and Montes, who lacked the military talents and the charisma of Turcios Lima, had great difficulty in taking over the leadership role.

Arana's forces applied relentless pressure against the guerrillas in the eastern mountains for more than a year. His infantry companies were reinforced by several groups of paramilitary irregulars that had been armed and equipped by the government. Supported by the air force, the regulars and irregulars on the ground reportedly were indiscriminate in their killing as they pursued the insurgents. Eventually, the insurgents were forced to be constantly on the move, and their base of support among the peasants was eroded as the peasant casualties mounted and as civic action programs were begun in areas cleared of insurgents. Yon Sosa, badly wounded, was forced to flee to Mexico for treatment; although he returned later, his Alejandro de León Front was defeated, and the survivors were dispersed by the Arana offensive. By the end of 1967 the insurgency in Zacapa and Izabal was over.

No longer able to evade the government forces, most of the remaining insurgents fled to Guatemala City, where they hoped to find hiding places. Soon, however, they left hiding to join the urban insurgents who had been active at low levels since the beginning of the 1960s. The National Police force was no match for the reorganized insurgents as they perfected the techniques of urban terrorism, a problem that has confounded urban police worldwide. Those techniques included kidnappings for political purposes and for ransom to finance guerrilla activities. Ransoms in 1970 reportedly amounted to more than US\$1 million, and wealthy potential targets of the kidnappers began making regular payments as protection money. Victims of the violence included the ambassadors from the United States and West Germany and two officers of the United States military group.

The insurgents had no monopoly on urban terrorism and violence. Just as Arana had been assisted by paramilitary irregulars in the coun-



*Street in the village of Santa María de Jesús  
Courtesy David Mangurian, Inter-American Development Bank*

tryside, urban vigilantes arose to assist the army and police in the city. Urban killings increased spectacularly after the formation of the Council of Anticommunists of Guatemala (Consejo Anticomunista de Guatemala—CADEG), the New Anticommunist Organization (Nueva Organización Anticomunista—NOA), and the Organized National Anticommunist Movement (Movimiento Anticomunista Nacional Organizado—MANO, Mano Blanca, or White Hand), which were only some of the groups said to be made up of off-duty policemen and army officers. Mano Blanca achieved its greatest notoriety perhaps when its vigilantes tortured and murdered Rogelia Cruz Martínez, a former Miss Guatemala, who was rumored to have leftist sympathies. Another Mano Blanca victim was Yon Sosa's sister, who was not and never had been a guerrilla.

In 1970 Yon Sosa, fleeing into Mexico to escape pursuit, was killed by a Mexican army patrol. His loss staggered the insurgents and their cause as had the earlier loss of Turcios Lima. The two rebels had exhibited leadership qualities and military talents that have not been matched by their successors. Also in that year, running on his anti-guerrilla record and a law and order platform, Arana Osorio won the presidency. During the campaign the new president uttered the state-

### *Guatemala: A Country Study*

ment that was associated with his name from that time on, that is, that he would turn the country into a vast cemetery if that were needed to bring peace.

Arana as president, intent on fulfilling his promises to end the insurgency, pressured the security forces to maintain a high level of counterinsurgency training. A brief lull in left-wing terrorism at the beginning of his presidency turned into a surge of attacks that brought on immediate retaliation, including the declaration of a state of siege. Assassinations by terrorists of both sides escalated, but again the numbers attributed to the vigilante groups dwarfed those of the insurgents. Vincente Collazo-Davila in "The Guatemalan Insurrection" wrote that "during the first 12 weeks of the state of siege (declared on November 12, 1970), approximately 1,600 individuals were arrested without formal charges, and 700 to 1,000 were killed by vigilante groups. The guerrillas accounted for 25 to 30 deaths, including that of Arnaldo Otten Prado, a federal deputy and leader of the National Liberation Movement (Movimiento de Liberación Nacional—MLN), which was Arana's political party." The police and their allies reportedly used the opportunity to kill off petty criminals and recidivists who otherwise would have overcrowded the jails and overloaded court dockets. Another Latin Americanist, Daniel L. Premo, in describing Arana's term in office said: "During the first three years of his presidency, the incidence of murders and 'disappearances' reached unprecedented levels. Depending on source, the number of victims, many mutilated beyond recognition, ranges from 3,500 to 15,000."

Arana was accused of trying to exterminate all opposition before the presidential elections of 1974 in order that he might choose his successor without arousing any unmanageable commotion among the electorate. He was able to place his choice in office, but only at the expense of having the election branded an outright fraud. It came as no great surprise that General Arana had chosen another army general, Langerud, to succeed him, but in addition to General Langerud's heading a coalition ticket, General Ríos Montt headed another coalition, and Colonel Ernesto Paiz Novales was the candidate of a third group; the army had all bases covered. When the ballot count indicated that Ríos Montt was the winner, Arana ordered a recount that awarded the prize to Langerud. Ríos Montt then accepted assignment as military attaché to Spain.

Langerud billed himself as a reformer, and in fact he did lower the tempo of official violence from the heights achieved during the preceding four years. Political murders in 1975 and 1976 were said to average 20 per month, the lowest level in several years. Langerud's relaxation of the hard line brought about a resurgence of moderate politics that had not been seen since the Arévalo-Arbenz era. Students, workers, and peasants once more formed organizations and unions and, for a brief period, political life took on a semblance of normality. The strength of the newly formed movements frightened the oligarchy, however, and a quick return to rule by assassination began to eliminate



prominent leaders of labor unions, student organizations, and peasant cooperatives. By 1977 the human rights situation had deteriorated to a level that brought condemnation from the administration of President Carter, causing Langerud to complain that if United States aid depended on his acceptance of outside interference in internal affairs, then Guatemala would get along without such aid.

In March 1978 General Lucas García won the presidency in yet another fraudulent election. Before Langerud turned over the reins in July, however, his presidency was stained by the Panzós Massacre. A large group of Indian peasants had assembled in the town square of Panzós, in Alta Verapaz, to protest the loss of their ancestral lands to developers. Nervous soldiers of the PMA, who had surrounded the square, opened fire on the unarmed crowd; they killed more than 100 Indians, making no distinction among men, women, or children. The shock incurred by the news of the massacre brought over 100,000 demonstrators into the streets of Guatemala City. Frightened by the magnitude of the demonstration, the government allowed it to run its course, and it ended peacefully as the crowds dispersed at the end of the day. A few months later when tens of thousands of demonstrators took to the streets to protest increased bus fares, the authorities were prepared to handle large numbers; mass arrests took place, hundreds of demonstrators were wounded by police and army gunfire, and 40 people were killed. The reaction to the bus fare demonstration set the stage for officially condoned violence at a level theretofore unknown.

Under Lucas García the security forces waged war against anyone to the left of center on the political spectrum, and the regime decided where the center lay. An article in the *New York Times* of May 3, 1981, asserted that "from the evidence, killing alone does not satisfy the revengeful motives of the security forces. The coroner in one of the capital's four morgues said that two out of every three bodies brought to his morgue bore signs of torture. Virtually all of the murder victims found in the countryside are manacled and indicate beatings, facial disfigurements or violence to the sexual organs." The victims of the death squads were leaders or potential leaders—lawyers, teachers, journalists, priests and nuns, union organizers, peasant activists—but the killing often appeared to be random and indiscriminate, and the number of innocent victims escalated at an alarming rate. In eliminating the so-called leftist enemy—all branded "communist" by the government—the security forces also killed leaders of the moderate center, such as Alberto Fuentes Mohr and Manuel Colom Argueta.

By 1979 the regime was not even making a pretense about who was responsible for the political murders. Fuentes Mohr was machine-gunned by soldiers in uniform on a main street of the capital in the middle of the day. The gang that eliminated Colom Argueta in the same fashion wore civilian clothing, but a helicopter hovering over the scene of the assassination left little doubt concerning the identity of the gunmen. Despite condemnation by other governments, international organizations, religious bodies, and human rights groups, the

bloodletting continued. The supposed objective of fighting communism, which had been barely credible for several years, no longer had any validity; the true objective had become the elimination of opposition of any political persuasion, even including right-wing colleagues who incurred the displeasure of the leadership.

The disdain of the Lucas García regime for normal foreign relations was demonstrated on January 31, 1980, when the police stormed the Spanish embassy to evict Indian squatters. A group of Indian peasants from Quiché had occupied the embassy and had taken the ambassador and his staff and visitors hostage; a gesture intended to attract attention to the atrocities committed in their villages by army troops in pursuit of guerrillas. The Spanish ambassador, Maximo Cajal y López, believed that the situation could be resolved peacefully and pleaded with the police surrounding the embassy to withdraw to allow him to deal with the Indians. Instead the police stormed the building. A Molotov cocktail carried by one of the occupiers was thrown or dropped, setting a fire that destroyed the building and almost everyone in it. Ambassador Cajal y López and Gregorio Yujá Xoná, an Indian peasant, escaped the inferno and were taken to a hospital for treatment of burns. The next day Yujá Xoná was kidnapped from the hospital by a gang of armed men; his bullet-riddled body was later found at the gates of a university. Fearing for his own life, the ambassador sought and received sanctuary in the United States embassy.

Although the Panzós Massacre and the Spanish embassy affair were probably the most publicized incidents of the government's violence against its citizens, political murder and assassination in the city and indiscriminate killing by army troops in the countryside had become routine. Guatemalan newspapers reported daily body counts. As the term of Lucas García drew to a close, even some army officers had had enough, but their complaint was against excessive corruption rather than excessive killing. In any event, they deposed the offending president and installed a junta.

#### ***The Postcoup Period***

During the year after the coup, controversy surrounded the reporting of events in Guatemala. Some observers have stated that the army under the new regime continued its indiscriminate killing of peasants, particularly Indians, in the western Highlands where guerrillas remained active. Others have taken the position that the new government made a definite effort to end army and police brutality and the atrocities that had become commonplace. On the scene, before the imposed censorship of the press, the conservative newspaper *El Grafico* had editorially condemned the postcoup army for its savagery, brutality, and indiscriminate killing. Nevertheless, at the end of the first year—for a variety of reasons, including censorship, misinformation, and international politics among others—it was difficult to assess the pluses and minuses of the postcoup military government (see *The Dominant Role of the Army*, ch. 4).

Ríos Montt, in effect, headed a military dictatorship. For most of his first year in power, he ruled under martial law (see *The State of Siege*, this ch.). Although condemning the excesses of his predecessor, he did nothing to bring to justice the high-level officials who had enriched themselves enormously at the expense of the public. Lucas García, apparently untroubled, continued to manage the huge estates he had acquired during his term in office. Ríos Montt condemned corruption and demanded high standards of himself and his colleagues, but he allowed the enriched corrupters not only to remain free but also to enjoy their ill-gotten riches. In an article scheduled for publication in 1983, political scientist Piero Gleijeses states that "only seven out of 27 or 28 generals, and a mere handful of colonels have been retired."

Almost immediately after the coup the urban activities of the so-called death squads ended, convincing some observers that the vigilantes had in fact been police and army personnel acting on orders from the highest political levels. Urban political murder and kidnapping that had reached epidemic proportions under Lucas García were less of a problem under the succeeding regime. Critics, however, claimed that in its war against guerrillas in the rural Highlands, the regime killed numerous innocent peasants.

Two months after taking power, the junta—Ríos Montt, Maldonado Schaad, and Gordillo—announced that an amnesty would be in effect during the entire month of June. The amnesty applied to security personnel who had broken the law while engaged in counterinsurgency as well as to the insurgents themselves. Ríos Montt promised that "whoever doesn't give up I'm going to shoot" and stated that at the end of the amnesty period "exceptional measures" would be taken. Opposition elements scorned the amnesty as a public relations gambit designed to portray the new regime as a reasonable government. They publicly recalled an earlier amnesty in which President Méndez Montenegro freed 165 political prisoners, all of whom were later murdered by Mano Blanca or the Secret Anticommunist Army (*Ejército Secreto Anticomunista—ESA*). Ríos Montt, ending the amnesty, announced that almost 2,000 insurgents had surrendered; other sources stated that 200 to 300 was more accurate. He then declared a 30-day state of siege saying that he needed such a legal framework for the actions he would take. The state of siege remained in effect until March 23, 1983.

For the remainder of 1982 the security forces attacked the guerrilla units in a maximum effort. In his so-called Operation Victory 82, Ríos Montt predicted that the condition of virtual civil war that had existed for so many years would be ended before the year was out and, indeed, in December he announced that victory had been achieved. During that all-out offensive against the insurgents, the regime was criticized for a disregard of human rights, said by many observers to be equal to or worse than that of the preceding administration. As had always been true of the counterinsurgency, Indian and ladino peasants suffered huge losses in lives, livestock, crops, houses, and villages. In some

areas the security forces were accused of destroying everything in their path, but officials denied vehemently that such activities had occurred.

The Conference of Catholic Bishops estimated in the summer of 1982 that more than 1 million displaced persons throughout the country needed shelter and food and that large numbers of them needed medical attention. The government dismissed the estimate as an exaggeration. Despite denials and protestations by the government, numerous church and human rights groups continued to report incidents of rape, torture, and murder. Ríos Montt consistently denied all such reports, but his government was widely condemned by human rights groups in Latin America, North America, and Europe.

Amnesty International in a July 1982 report claimed there were "massive extrajudicial executions in rural areas under the Government of General Efraín Ríos Montt." The organization also stated that it was aware that the government blamed the guerrillas for most of the massacres but said that its findings revealed that, almost without exception, government forces had been responsible in the cases investigated. Denying the charges, a government spokesman said, "the macabre way in which the report describes the murder of children and rape of women does not apply to countries like Guatemala, where the restraint provided by morals and religious convictions would allow no one to act that way, no matter how criminal the person may be." The government statement added that "the most terrible aspect of this case is the way in which the naiveté of professional and intellectual sectors in Europe is being manipulated, leading them to believe untrue stories that are invented for political purposes." The Reagan administration officially took the position that some Amnesty International sources had been faulty and others fraudulent. Many evangelical Protestant groups in the United States also contradicted the report, claiming that the reported massacres were the work of left-wing guerrillas rather than of Guatemala's security forces.

Despite the criticism of the Amnesty International report, several other human rights groups and religious organizations continued to make public their specific criticisms of the Guatemalan government's counterinsurgency activities. For example, two Roman Catholic missionary groups—the Maryknoll Sisters and the Maryknoll Fathers, Brothers, and Lay Missioners, based in Maryknoll, New York—issued a statement in December 1982 on behalf of 70 of their missionaries then working in Guatemala. The statement supported the Guatemalan bishops who seven months earlier had used the term "genocide" in condemning the government-perpetrated massacres of Indians in the Highlands. Lamenting the continuation of human rights violations after the coup, the statement added that "the destruction of the Indian culture and wanton waste of life is the result of a social sin which is manifested in the structures of economic exploitation, social and racial discrimination and political oppression through many decades." Similar statements were regularly published by Oxfam America, the Washington Office on Latin America, and the Americas Watch Committee.

On his visit to Guatemala on March 7, 1983, Pope John Paul II demanded a halt to "flagrant injustices" in the country and asked the government to protect the Indian community and the priests and nuns who work in that community as missionaries. Three days before the pope's visit, six men convicted earlier by a secret court were executed despite a Vatican plea for clemency. The executions were seen by some observers as a calculated affront by the Guatemalan president to the leader of the world's Roman Catholics. The pope made no public reference to the executions, but in two homilies delivered to hundreds of thousands of attentive listeners in Guatemala City and Quezaltenango, he severely condemned the inhumanity of governments as well as the inhumanity of guerrillas. The pope declared that "when man is downtrodden, when rights are violated, when flagrant injustices are committed, when he is submitted to tortures, done violence to by abductions, or one violates his right to life, one commits a crime and a very grave offense against God."

#### **Civil Defense Patrols**

In September 1981 the army chief of staff, Brigadier General Manuel Benedicto Lucas García (the president's brother), ordered the formation of the first Civil Defense Patrol (Patrulla de Autodefensa Civil—PAC). During the next several months a few thousand peasants were recruited, but training was minimal to nonexistent, and the ragtag groups were ill armed. Patrol members (*patrulleros*) usually carried clubs or machetes, but occasionally one would be armed with an old shotgun or rifle. These formations of peasants were intended to operate as rural militia—patrolling and guarding villages and crops, establishing roadblocks to intercept strangers (guerrillas) in their areas, acting as the eyes and the ears of the regular troops, and fighting when necessary. The PACs frequently suffered heavy casualties.

After the coup d'état the new administration recognized that the PAC could serve a much wider purpose, that is, it could be greatly expanded and used as a control mechanism. The new basic premise was that peasants enrolled in PACs would not be enticed to support the guerrillas because such activity would simply become too dangerous. The army stepped up its recruitment processes and began to enroll large numbers of peasants in the civil force, particularly in those departments where guerrilla activity was most prevalent. By the end of 1982 Ríos Montt said that there were 300,000 Indians from 550 villages and towns already in patrols but that they needed weapons. By April 1983 the total had reached 400,000.

When presidents Ríos Montt and Reagan met in December, the Guatemalan asked for old rifles for the arming of as many militiamen as possible, but as of the spring of 1983 the United States had not publicly responded to the request. The involvement of very large numbers of peasants in the PACs complemented other programs that had been inaugurated under Ríos Montt that aimed at winning the peasants over to the government cause or, at least, weaning them away from their support of the guerrillas. The rifles and beans (*fusiles y*

*frijoles* program, according to Ríos Montt, represented the two-pronged approach of his government to the country's immediate problems: rifles symbolized the struggle against the insurgents, and beans symbolized the government aid to loyal Guatemalans.

***The Opposition Forces***

Arrayed against the government at the time of the coup and still there, though weakened, more than a year later were four distinct guerrilla groups that had voluntarily associated under an umbrella organization known as the Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity (Unidad Revolucionaria Nacional Guatemalteca—URNG). The agreement to associate was drawn up and signed by representatives of the FAR, the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (Ejército Guerrillero de los Pobres—EGP), the Organization of People in Arms (Organización del Pueblo en Armas—ORPA), and a faction of the PGT calling itself PGT-Núcleo, which was derived from its full title, Partido Guatemalteco del Trabajo-Núcleo (Guatemalan Labor Party-Nucleus). The leaders of the four groups in early 1983 were FAR, Pablo Monsanto; EGP, Rolando Morán; ORPA, Gaspar Ilom; and PGT-Núcleo, Mario Sánchez.

Among the major differences in the guerrilla movement of the early 1980s were the support given to the guerrillas by the formerly passive Indians and the appearance of Indian recruits in guerrilla ranks. This was the result of a concerted effort on the part of the EGP to break down the age-old aloofness of the Indians and to involve them in the insurrection. Marlise Simons, writing in *Foreign Policy* in 1981, described the campaign to gain Indian support for the guerrilla cause, "Undismayed by the challenge, young members of the Guerrilla Army of the Poor (EGP) moved into the El Quiché area in 1975, learned Indian languages, gave the people legal and marketing advice, became involved in cooperatives, and slowly gained their confidence." In the eight years since those early efforts, most Indians who became active against the government associated with EGP or, later, with ORPA.

The FAR in 1983 was small and not nearly as active as it had been in earlier years; nevertheless, it still constituted a threat. Most of the guerrilla actions of 1982 and early 1983 were carried out by units of the EGP and ORPA. Little was known about PGT-Núcleo, although it was known to be an armed organization capable of carrying out guerrilla attacks. The announced aims of the umbrella organization were to end economic exploitation by the minuscule wealthy class and foreign companies, to strive for equality among ethnic groups, to establish representative government, and to enforce basic human rights. In order to achieve these goals, the URNG called for a popular revolution.

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Literature about the Guatemalan military and police forces since the

early 1960s has been concerned primarily with counterinsurgency. Much of that literature has been biased in favor of the right or the left. Analyses in English about the military as an institution rather than as a counterinsurgency force or as a political actor have been difficult to find. A good but necessarily brief synopsis of the Guatemalan military was written by Gwynne Dyer for *World Armies*, published in 1979. *Bitter Fruit: The Untold Story of the American Coup in Guatemala*, by Stephen Schlesinger and Stephen Kinzer, is a well-documented, highly critical account of the events of 1954, which includes a valuable final chapter titled, "The Aftermath." Another recent book, of much wider scope but with a good assessment of the Guatemalan situation through 1981, is *Politics in Central America* by Thomas P. Anderson.

Articles and news reports are the best sources of information on the final days of the Lucas García regime and the Riós Montt government at this early stage (mid-1983). Alan Riding wrote a perceptive situation report on the Lucas García counterinsurgency in the *New York Times Magazine* of August 24, 1980. Amnesty International published damning reports on the human rights situation in 1981 and 1982. A two-part series by George Black in the *NACLA Report on the Americas* in its first two issues of 1983 is of particular importance despite its obvious orientation toward one side. In 1982 *AEI Foreign Policy and Defense Review* presented important information from different perspectives in articles by Thomas Enders, Howard Wiarda, David Palmer, Michael Kryzanek, and Margaret Hayes. (For further information and complete citations, see Bibliography.)

## Appendix

*Table*

- 1 Metric Conversion Coefficients
- 2 Central Government Consolidated Budget Summary, 1976-79
- 3 Labor Force by Sector, Selected Years, 1950-80
- 4 Land Distribution, 1950, 1964, and 1979
- 5 Cultivated Area of Major Crops, Selected Years, 1970-78
- 6 Production of Major Crops, Selected Years, 1970-78
- 7 Major Exports, 1977-81
- 8 Exports to and Imports from the Central American Common Market, 1977-81
- 9 Imports by Major Commodity Group, 1977-81
- 10 Summary of Balance of Payments, 1977-81
- 11 United States Military Aid and Sales to Guatemala, Fiscal Years 1950-82
- 12 Aircraft Inventory, March 1983



## Appendix

*Table 1. Metric Conversion Coefficients*

When you know	Multiply by	To find
Millimeters .....	0.04	inches
Centimeters .....	0.39	inches
Meters .....	3.3	feet
Kilometers .....	0.62	miles
Hectares (10,000 m <sup>2</sup> ) .....	2.47	acres
Square kilometers .....	0.39	square miles
Cubic meters .....	35.3	cubic feet
Liters .....	0.26	gallons
Kilograms .....	2.2	pounds
Metric tons .....	0.98	long tons
.....	1.1	short tons
.....	2.204	pounds
Degrees Celsius .....	9	degrees Fahrenheit
(Centigrade)	divide by 5 and add 32	

*Table 2. Central Government Consolidated Budget Summary,  
1976-79<sup>1</sup>  
(in millions of quetzals)<sup>2</sup>*

	1976	1977	1978	1979
<b>Revenues</b>				
Current revenues .....	407	591	662	678
Tax revenues .....	370	557	621	645
Direct taxes .....	69	81	104	125
Corporate income tax .....	45	57	74	98
Personal income tax .....	14	14	20	16
Property taxes .....	10	11	10	12
Indirect taxes .....	302	475	517	520
Import duties .....	70	97	106	119
Export taxes .....	49	152	158	125
Coffee .....	39	141	147	112
Other .....	10	11	11	13
Taxes on goods .....	67	73	84	96
Taxes on services .....	9	10	11	14
Taxes on transactions (stamp tax, etc.) .....	107	143	157	166
Nontax revenues .....	36	34	41	33

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

*Table 2.—Continued*

	1976	1977	1978	1979
Expenditures .....	570	643	725	837
Current expenditures .....	328	411	476	531
Salaries and wages .....	152	194	250	261
Goods and services .....	71	105	98	95
Interest on debt .....	26	33	38	51
Transfers to private sector .....	37	30	20	47
Transfers to public sector .....	40	47	67	73
Transfers abroad .....	2	2	3	3
Capital expenditures (net) <sup>1</sup> .....	242	232	249	306
Fixed investment .....	75	67	72	114
Financial investment .....	88	47	43	36
Capital transfers to state enterprises .....	41	69	106	134
Capital transfers to other public sector .....	34	36	15	19
Other capital transfers and revenues (net) <sup>2</sup> .....	4	13	12	3
Deficit .....	163	52	63	159

<sup>1</sup> Figures may not add to totals because of rounding.

<sup>2</sup> For value of the quetzal, see Glossary.

*Table 3. Labor Force by Sector, Selected Years, 1950-80*  
(in thousands of workers)

Sector	1950	1964	1974	1980
Agriculture (including forestry and fishing) .....	702	838	1,017	1,238
Mining .....	2	2	2	4
Manufacturing .....	118	181	237	290
Utilities .....	1	4	5	6
Construction .....	28	56	72	87
Trade and finance .....	56	95	127	157
Transportation and communications .....	16	34	44	55
Other services .....	101	152	210	259
Not specified .....	5	25	35	42
TOTAL .....	1,029	1,387	1,749	2,138

Appendix

Table 4. Land Distribution, 1950, 1964, and 1979<sup>1</sup>

Size <sup>2</sup> in hectares	Farm Units <sup>3</sup> in thousands			Area in thousands of hectares		
	1950	1964	1979	1950	1964	1979
0 to 0.7	74.3	85.1	166.7	29	33	55
0.7 to 1.4	91.6	98.7	121.4	95	95	115
1.4 to 3.5	99.8	129.1	128.6	212	271	267
3.5 to 7	42.4	52.0	51.8	198	243	240
7 to 22.4	26.9	37.0	40.4	311	447	498
22.4 to 45	6.1	6.6	9.1	190	204	283
45 to 450	6.5	7.9	12.3	813	915	1,282
450 to 900	0.6	0.6	0.9	354	346	536
Over 900	0.5	0.4	0.5	1,519	896	903
TOTAL <sup>4</sup>	348.7	417.3	531.7	3,721	3,449	4,180

<sup>1</sup> Years of agricultural censuses. Some differences in completeness of data between censuses.

<sup>2</sup> Odd sizes reflect basic data recorded in local units of area converted to hectares.

<sup>3</sup> A farm unit is defined as operating as a single unit, even though it may have one or more parcels. A single owner may own more than one farm unit.

<sup>4</sup> Figures may not add to total because of rounding.

Source: Based on information from Richard Hough et al., *Land and Labor in Guatemala: An Assessment*, Guatemala City, 1982, 70.

Table 5. Cultivated Area of Major Crops, Selected Years, 1970-78  
(in thousands of hectares)

Crop	1970	1976	1977	1978
Corn	693	514	514	499
Beans	185	98	138	134
Rice	9	19	11	11
Wheat	30	39	45	26
Sorghum	52	56	61	50
Coffee	219	248	248	244
Cotton	85	83	99	127
Sugarcane	21	88	98	98
Bananas	5	5	5	5
Rubber	4	11	11	11
TOTAL	1,303	1,161	1,230	1,205
Basic crops	969	726	769	720
Export crops	334	435	461	485

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

*Table 6. Production of Major Crops, Selected Years, 1970-78*  
(in thousands of tons)<sup>1</sup>

Crop	1970	1976	1977	1978
Corn .....	719	673	555	572
Beans .....	62	64	40	35
Rice .....	14	33	10	17
Wheat .....	31	45	57	33
Sorghum .....	45	94	94	75
Coffee .....	115	145	146	145
Cotton .....	63	96	133	141
Sugarcane .....	1,688	4,145	5,964	5,135
Bananas .....	284	308	272	246
Rubber .....	3	8	8	8

*Table 7. Major Exports, 1977-81*  
(in millions of United States dollars)<sup>1</sup>

Commodity	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
Coffee (including soluble)	526	475	432	464	295
Cotton	155	142	192	166	131
Sugar	85	44	54	69	85
Fresh meat	28	31	41	29	29
Cardamom	27	27	49	56	34
Nickel	0	6	27	59	0
Petroleum (crude)	0	0	0	24	22
Bananas	21	24	19	45	51
Other fruits and products	8	12	14	19	22
Plants, seeds, and flowers	7	4	9	12	11
Vegetables and pulses	10	13	16	37	31
Lead, zinc, and other concentrates	7	3	6	5	4
Rubber (tires and tubes)	9	12	9	17	17
Other	277	296	373	518	494
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>1,160</b>	<b>1,089</b>	<b>1,241</b>	<b>1,520</b>	<b>1,226</b>

\* Exports are f.o.b., freight on board.

Source: Based on information from Guatemala: Banco de Guatemala, *Boletín estadístico julio-septiembre 1982*, Guatemala City, 1982, Table 46.

*Table S. Exports to and Imports from the Central American Common Market, 1977-81\**  
(in millions of United States dollars)

Year Trade	Costa Rica	El Salvador	Honduras	Nicaragua	Total
1981					
Exports to .....	57	188	65	69	379
Imports from .....	<u>57</u>	<u>103</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>195</u>
Balance .....	0	85	46	53	184
1980					
Exports to .....	90	194	61	96	441
Imports from .....	<u>65</u>	<u>99</u>	<u>37</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>217</u>
Balance .....	25	95	24	80	224
1979					
Exports to .....	71	153	50	32	306
Imports from .....	<u>62</u>	<u>164</u>	<u>30</u>	<u>20</u>	<u>276</u>
Balance .....	9	-11	20	12	30
1978					
Exports to .....	68	121	37	38	264
Imports from .....	<u>40</u>	<u>113</u>	<u>25</u>	<u>29</u>	<u>207</u>
Balance .....	28	8	12	9	57
1977					
Exports to .....	47	106	29	41	223
Imports from .....	<u>25</u>	<u>46</u>	<u>19</u>	<u>16</u>	<u>106</u>
Balance .....	22	60	10	25	117

\* Exports are f.o.b. (weight on board); imports are c.i.f. (cost, insurance, and freight).

Source: Based on information from Guatemala, Banco de Guatemala, *Boletín estadístico julio-septiembre 1982*, Guatemala City, 1982, Table 47.

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

*Table 9. Imports by Major Commodity Group, 1977-81*  
(in millions of United States dollars)

Commodity Group	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
Food	55	78	83	104	106
Beverages and tobacco	4	3	6	7	4
Crude materials, excluding fuels	18	22	28	43	40
Fuels and lubricants	148	168	242	344	378
Animal and vegetable oils	5	5	8	11	16
Chemicals	192	254	273	315	312
Basic manufactures	201	262	320	303	321
Machinery and transport equipment	355	395	423	359	353
Miscellaneous manufactured products	73	98	114	106	135
Other	2	4	7	6	8
<b>TOTAL*</b>	<b>1,053</b>	<b>1,286</b>	<b>1,504</b>	<b>1,598</b>	<b>1,673</b>

\* Imports are c.i.f. cost, insurance, and freight.

Source: Based on information from Guatemala, Banco de Guatemala, *Boletín estadístico julio-septiembre 1982*, Guatemala City, 1982, Table 49.

*Table 10. Summary of Balance of Payments, 1977-81*  
(in millions of United States dollars)

	1977	1978	1979	1980	1981
<b>Current account</b>					
Commodity exports, f.o.b.	1,160	1,092	1,221	1,520	1,299
Commodity imports, f.o.b.	-1,087	-1,284	-1,395	-1,473	-1,540
Export of services	214	263	331	305	235
Import of services	-418	-449	-480	-638	-650
Transfers, net	96	116	127	110	91
Current account balance	35	262	196	-176	-565
<b>Long-term capital</b>					
Direct investment, net	78	105	102	95	127
Official and financial, net	66	102	129	106	388
Other, net	46	49	43	43	36
Total long-term capital	190	256	274	244	551
<b>Short-term capital</b>					
Commercial obligations, net	3	92	146	34	31
Other, net	9	6	-222	-275	-168
Total short-term capital	12	98	-76	-241	-137
Errors and omissions	12	11	17	8	29
Change in reserves <sup>a</sup>	179	-69	-15	249	180

<sup>a</sup> Preliminary data.

<sup>b</sup> Freight on board.

A minus sign indicates an increase of reserves.

Source: Based on information from Guatemala, Banco de Guatemala, *Boletín estadístico julio-septiembre 1982*, Guatemala City, 1982, Table 40.

*Table 11. United States Military Aid and Sales to Guatemala  
Fiscal Years 1950-82  
in thousands of United States dollars*

Year	Deliveries from FMS	Commercial Arms Sales	MAI	PMFJ
1950-76	19,560	2,236	16,016	6,984
1977	2,169	1,020	104	509
1978	2,410	550	46	0
1979	3,408	868	1	0
1980	2,230	417	65	0
1981	462	7	7	0
1982	688	750	14	0

Foreign Military Sales

Military Assistance Program

International Military Education and Training

Source: Based on information from United States, Department of Defense, Security Assistance Agency, *Foreign Military Sales, Foreign Military Construction Sales and Military Assistance Facts*, Washington, 1982, 11-12, 37-38, 49-50, 71-72.

*Table 12. Aircraft Inventory, March 1983*

Quantity	Manufacturer	Type	Function
<i>Fixed wing aircraft</i>			
10	Cessna	A-37B	Ground support
3	do	T-37C	Trainer
3	Aérospatiale		
	(France)	CM-170	do
5	Lockheed	T-33A	do
10	Aerotec		
	(Brazil)	T-23	do
12	Pilatus		
	(Switzerland)	PC-7	do
9	Douglas	C-47	Transport
1	do	C-54	do
1	do	DC-6	do
10	Israel Aircraft Industries		
		Arava	do
1	Beechcraft	Super King	Utility liaison
		Air 200	
6	Cessna	170	do
3	do	180	do
2	do	U206C	do
<i>Helicopters</i>			
9	Bell	UH-1D/H	Armed
3	Sikorsky	UH-19	Transport
1	Hiller	OH-23G	Utility
16	Bell	Various	Armament added

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## Glossary

*alcalde*—Mayor. Also, in Indian society a high official of a *cofradía* (*q.r.*)

*audiencia*—Technically, a Spanish colonial court but also assigned wide administrative powers. By extension, territorial division in the colonial system.

*caudillo*—Dictator or strongman, often but not always from the armed forces.

*cofradía*—Religious brotherhood associated with the veneration of a saint. Women sometimes form a parallel organization.

*encomienda*—Fiduciary grant of land and related tribute collection rights over groups of Indians on the land, conferred by Spanish crown on individuals who undertook, in return, to maintain order and to propagate Christianity among their charges.

*fiesta*—Feast. It may be a religious celebration held on holy days or honoring the community patron saint, or it may be held to celebrate important agricultural, civic, or family events, such as independence, baptism, or marriage.

*finca*—Farm or estate of varying size, but not one that contains merely a subsistence plot.

*gross domestic product (GDP)*—A value measure of the flow of domestic goods and services produced by an economy over a period of time, such as a year. Only output values of goods for final consumption and investment are included because the values of primary and intermediate production are assumed to be included in final prices. GDP sometimes aggregated and shown at market prices, meaning that indirect taxes and subsidies are included; when these have been eliminated, the result is GDP at factor cost. The word *gross* indicates that deductions for depreciation of physical assets have not been made.

*International Monetary Fund (IMF)*—Established along with the World Bank (*q.r.*) in 1945, the IMF is a specialized agency affiliated with the United Nations and is responsible for stabilizing international exchange rates and payments. The main business of the IMF is the provision of loans to its members (including industrialized and developing countries) when they experience balance of payments difficulties. These loans frequently carry conditions that require substantial internal economic adjustments by the recipients, most of which are developing countries. In mid-1983 the IMF had 146 members.

*ladino*—First applied in colonial times to acculturated Indians and individuals of mixed heritage who lived in the Spanish settlements, accepting their language and many Hispanic customs. Later extended to all individuals who do not espouse an Indian style of

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

life. Term applies to anyone who is not a cultural Indian, which includes persons of European and Asiatic heritage as well as acculturated Indians. Label is sometimes resented by members of the upper class who prefer to use it synonymously with mestizo (mixed white and Indian ancestry).

quetzal (Q)—Guatemala's major unit of currency. Consists of 100 centavos and has equaled US \$1 since 1925. Also, the national bird.

World Bank—Informal name used to designate a group of three affiliated international institutions: the International Bank for Reconstruction and Development (IBRD), the International Development Association (IDA), and the International Finance Corporation (IFC). The IBRD, established in 1945, has the primary purpose of providing loans to developing countries for productive projects. The IDA, a legally separate loan fund but administered by the staff of the IBRD, was set up in 1960 to furnish credits to the poorest developing countries on much easier terms than those of conventional IBRD loans. The IFC founded in 1956, supplements the activities of the IBRD through loans and assistance designed specifically to encourage the growth of productive private enterprises in the less developed countries. The president and certain senior officers of the IBRD hold the same positions in the IFC. The three institutions are owned by the governments of the countries that subscribe their capital. In 1983 the IBRD had over 140 members, the IDA had 130, and the IFC over 120. To participate in the World Bank group, member states must first belong to the International Monetary Fund (IMF—*q.v.*).

## Index

- Agrarian Reform Law: 26-27, 29, 103, 104, 105
- agriculture (*see also* crops, exports, land-ownership): xii, 88, 90, 96-112, development financing, 119, labor force, xxiii, 51, 95, 223
- Aguacapa: 115
- air force: xiv, 195-196, 198, strength, xxiv
- aircraft: 176, 195, 227, national airline, 91
- airfields: xiii, 93, 188, 195
- Alejos, Roberto: 31
- Alliance for Progress: 131
- Alta Verapaz (department): xvi, 19, 45, industry, 115, landownership, 104, 106, Panzós demonstration, 37, 58
- altitude: 45
- Alvarado, Pedro: 7, 182
- Alvarez Martínez, Gustavo: xxi
- America*: 190
- American and Foreign Power company: 34
- American Institute for Free Labor Development: 154
- Americas Watch Committee: 214
- Amnesty International: 136, 158, 214
- Andrade Díaz-Durán, Fernando: xxii
- Antigua Guatemala: xvi, 47, 60, earthquake, 7, 46
- Arana, Francisco Javier: 22-23, 24, 130, 184, 185
- Arana Osorio, Carlos: 35, 36, 133, guerrilla leader, 33, 208, Jackal of Zacapa, 34, 132, 186, politics, 163, 166, presidency, 153, 164, 167, 209, 210, wealth acquired, 134
- Arbenz Guzmán, Jacobo: xiv, 23, 24, 130, 184, presidency, 4, 25-27, 28, 147, 150, 185, 204
- Arce, Manuel José: 15, 16
- archaeology: 5
- Arévalo, Juan José: xix, 31, 131, 184, 207, presidency, 4, 23, 147
- Argentina: 173, 197
- Argueta Villalta, Victor Manuel: 139, 188
- armed forces (*see also* army): 194-198, enlisted personnel, xxv, 191, 194, illiteracy, xxiv, military aid received, 175, 176, strength, xiv, 193
- arms and military equipment: 134, 176, 193, 195
- army (*see also* military officers): xiv, 164, 181, 194-195, 198, strength, xxiv
- Army Day: xix
- Army High Command: xvii
- Asians: xxiii
- assassinations: 4, 24, 30, 33, 34, 35, 74, 77, 130, 131, 133, 145, 156, 161, 162, 186, 209, 210, 211, 212, executions, 21, 29, 136, 154, 184, 200, found dead, 32, massacres, xviii, 37, 155, 158
- Association of University Students: 155-156
- Asturias Valenzuela, Ricardo: xvii
- audiencia* system: 9
- Austria: 176
- Authentic Nationalist Center (CAN): 35, 156, 163, 165, 166
- Autonomous Trade Union Federation of Guatemala: 154, 157
- Bahía de Amatique: 47
- Baja Verapaz (department): xvi, 45
- balance of payments: 89, 92, 120, 122-125, 226
- bananas: 102, 110, 223, exports, 20, 33, 87, 224
- Bank of Guatemala: 24, 119
- banks and banking: 118-121
- Barillas, Manuel Lisandro: 20
- Barrios, Justo Rufino: xxv, 3, 17, 53, 183, 198, 201, administration, 18, 19, 20, 74, 150
- beans: 108, 109, 215-216, 223, 224
- beef: 87, 111, 224, cattle, 18, 110
- Belgium: 134, 176
- Belize: xviii, 5, 17, 145-146, 168, 170-171, 179, 193
- Belmopan: 5
- Bergaño y Villegas, Simón: 14
- Bianchi Castillo, Francisco: xix, 140
- Bitter Fruit*: 28
- Black Caribs: xxiii, 51
- Boise Cascade Corporation: 34
- boundaries: 5, 45, 48, 171, 172
- Brazil: 135, 160
- Brett, Edward and Donna W.: 190
- Britain: 17, 31, 51, 176, Belize and, 170, 193
- British Honduras: 17
- budget: 76, 93, 222, deficits, 94, military expenditures, 193, revenues, 144
- bus fare riot: 154, 211
- Bustamante y Guerra, José de: 14
- cabinet. *See* ministries
- Cabot, John Moors: 28
- Cajal y López, Máximo: 212
- Cakchiquel dialect: 52
- Cámara de Agro: 148
- Canada: 115
- Canal de Chiquimulilla: 45
- cardamom: 110, 122, 224
- Cardozo y Aragón, Luis: 160

## Guatemala: A Country Study

- cargo system, 69, 70, 74
- Caribbean Basin Initiative, 175
- Carrera, José Rafael, xvi, 3, 16, 17, 183
- Carter, Jimmy, 174, 193, 211
- Casariago, Mario, 151
- Castillo Armas, Carlos, 24, 28, 29, 130, 163, assassination, 30, 131, presidency, 185, 206
- Castillo Ramírez, Fernando, 195
- Castro, Fidel, 156
- Catholic University, 30
- censorship, 136, 157, 158, 189, 212
- censuses, 48, 49, 97, agricultural, 96, 108
- centenario* of military officers, xvi, 133, 191-192
- Central American Bank for Economic Integration, 116
- Central American Common Market, 30, 85, 88, 89, 92, 116-117, 121, 172, 173, trade with, 122, 123, 225
- Central American Defense Council, 172
- Central American Democratic Community, 173
- Central American Workers' Party, 162
- Cerezo Arévalo, Vinicio, 164
- Cerna, Vicente, 17, 183
- CGUP. *See* Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity
- Chacón, Lázaro, 20-21
- Chambers of Industry and Commerce, 148
- Champerico, xiii, 93
- Charles V. King, 7
- Chevron oil company*, 114
- Chiapas, Mexico, xvi, 8, 15, 171
- chicle, 111
- children, 66, infant mortality, 75, 79
- Chile, 173
- Chimaltenango (department and capital), xvi, 75, 93, earthquake, 36, guerrillas, 161
- China, 176
- Chiquimula (department and capital), xvi, 203
- Chixoy, 115
- Christian Broadcast Network, 152
- Christian Century*, 190
- Christian Democrats (DCC), 34, 154, 164, 166
- church and state, xvii, xviii, 3, 33, 150-152
- Church of the Word (Iglesia del Verbo), xvii, xix, 75, 140, 150, 152
- Ciudad Vieja, 7
- Civil Defense Patrols, xviii, xx, 215-216
- civil liberties (*see also* assassinations, censorship, Decree Laws, political exiles, special courts), 131, human rights violations, 124, 134, 151, 175, 193, 211, 213, martial law, xix, 131-132, 139, 185, 186, 212
- climate, xi, 45, 48
- Coatepeque, 93
- Cobán, xvi, 93
- cocoa, 13, 110
- coffee, 46, 92, 223, exports, 18-19, 87, 109, 224, growers, 148, 156, prices, 89, 121
- Collazo-Davila, Vicente, 210
- Colom Argueta, Manuel, 166, 211
- Colombia, 197
- colonization programs, 24, 36, 58, 106
- Committee for National Reconstruction, 36
- Committee of Peasant Unity, 155, 157, 158, 160, 161
- Communist Party of Guatemala. *see also* Guatemalan Labor Party, 25, 27
- communists, 176, Arbenz and, 25, 185, 204, perceived threat from, 132, 206, presence, 4, 28, 153, 161, 207
- community development, directorate, 140, 142, model communities program, 176
- Confederation of Federated Workers, 154, 157
- Conference of Catholic Bishops, xviii, 214
- conscription, xxiv, 20, 132, 194, 196, press gangs, 190
- Conservative party, 15-16, 150, 183
- Considine, John, 192
- constitutions, 18, 138, 150, of 1945, 23-24, 103, of 1965, 31, 32, 71, 144, 145, 167, abrogated, 135, 138, 181
- construction, 90, 223, cement, 89
- consumer goods, 118, 120, 121
- Contadora Group, xvi-xvii
- contraceptive use, 67
- Contreras Valladeres, Sergio Alvaro, xix, 140
- cooperatives, 24, 36, 106, 155
- Coordinating Committee of Agricultural, Commercial, Industrial and Financial Associations (CACIF), 148, 149, 156
- corn, 108, 109, 223, 224
- Cortés, Hernán, 7, 182
- Costa Rica, 5, 15, 16, relations with, xvii, 116, 117, 172, trade, 225
- cotton, 13, 106, 223, 224, exports, 18, 87, 108, 109, 122, growers associations, 148, prices, 121
- Council of Anticommunists of Guatemala, 209
- Council of State, xvii, 139, 142, 143-144
- counterinsurgency operations, xiv, 4, 32-33, 34, 132, 135, 147, 175, 186, 202-203, 208, relief efforts, 152
- credit, 120, 121, agricultural, 107, 108
- crime and corruption, 164, 181, 203, 206, 213, election fraud, 167, smuggling, 13, 35, urban terrorism, 33, 34, 186, 210
- crops, 13, 45, 97, 106-110, 223, 224
- Cruz Martínez, Rogelia, 209



- Cubans: 206  
 Cuchumatanes: 47  
 Cuilapa: xvi, 93  
 currency: 118, 124  
  
 death rate: 78, 79  
 death squads: 31, 37, 132, 138, 156, 163, 200, 213  
 Decree Laws: 138, 144, 145, 182, 188  
 Degolyer, Jim: 152  
 Del Monte corporation: 34, 103, 110  
 Democratic Front Against Repression (FIDCR): 157, 158, 160, 162, 166  
 Democratic Revolutionary Unit: 165  
 Democratic Vanguard: 25  
 departments: xvi, 145, source of funds: 94  
 Díaz, Carlos Enrique: 29  
 Díaz del Castillo, Bernal: 12  
 diseases: xii, 21, 77, 78  
 divorce: 65  
 Dominican Republic: 173  
 Drake, Francis: 14  
 Dulles, Allen: 28  
 Dulles, John Foster: 27, 28, 29  
  
 earthquakes: 36-37, 46, 60, 76, 86, after effects: 89, 92, 120, 151, United States aid: 36, 174  
 Echeverría Vielman, José Guillermo: xviii  
 economic development institute: 23, 24  
 Edgar Ibarra Front: 208  
 education (*see also* schools): xii, 19, 76-77, Inquisition and: 13  
 Egypt: 175-176  
 Eisenhower, Dwight D.: 27, 28, 206  
*El Amigo de la Patria*: 14, 15  
*El Editor Constitucional*: 14, 16  
*El Gráfico*: 136, 158, 212  
 El Progreso (department and capital): xvi, 93  
 El Quiché area: 216  
 El Salvador: xxi, 5, 7, 16, 17, 22, 184, insurgents: 38, trade: 116, 122, 172, 225, United States and: 15  
 elections: xix, 32, 34, 162, 166-168, suffrage: 23, 29, 31  
 Electoral Registry: xxi, 137, 162, 166  
 Electric Bond and Share Company: 25, 34  
 Electric Company of Guatemala (EEG): 25, 34  
 electricity (*see also* hydroelectric power): 24, 34, 112, 115  
 elite class: xxiii, 38, 50, 150, 191, ladinos: 43, landowners: 147, military officers: xxv, 198  
 Embotelladora Guatemalteca: 154  
*encomienda* system: 7-8  
 energy: xii, xxiv, 112, 114-115  
 Enriquez Morales, Mario René: 188  
 ESA: *See* Secret Anticommunist Army  
  
 Escuela Politécnica: xv, xxv, 133, 191, 192, 197, 198, 207  
 Escuintla (department and capital): xvi, 93, 104, 110, crime: 203, 204, refinery: 114  
 Estrada Cabrera, Manuel: xxv, 3, 20, 184  
 Europeans: xxiii  
 Eximbal mining company: 115  
 exports: xii, 13, 18, 19, 32, 90, 121, 224, 225, agriculture: xviii, xxiv, 86, 87, 88, 89, 102, 109, 110, 111, 112, 223, crude oil: xii, 114, processed goods: 118, taxes on: 92  
  
 Falklands/Malvinas war: 173  
 Falwell, Jerry: 152  
 family and kinship: 62, 63-68  
 FIDCR: *See* Democratic Front Against Repression  
 Federation of Central America: 15-16, 183  
 Ferdinand VII of Spain: 14  
 Fermín Aycinena family: 13, 14  
 fertilizers: 107, 109  
 fiestas: 69, 70  
 Filisola, Vicente: 15  
 fiscal year: xii  
 fishing: 112  
 Flores: 47, 48, 93, 195  
 Flores Avendaño, Guillermo: 30  
 flowers, exports: 110, 122, 224  
 folk religion: 12, 71  
 Food and Agriculture Organization: 111  
 Food for Peace grants: 174  
 Foreign Broadcast Information Service: 188  
 foreign corporations (*see also* United Fruit Company): 21, 24, 31, 33-34, oil companies: 112  
 foreign exchange: 119, 121, 124, Central American peso: 116, rate: xii, 92, shortages: 109, 193  
 foreign investment: 24, 29, 31, 32, 117, 173, insurgency effects: 123  
*Foreign Policy*: 216  
 foreign priests: xxiii, 72, 74  
 foreign relations: *see also* Belize: xiv, 168, 170-176, international image: 136, Spain: 3, 6, 14, 15, 183  
 forests: 45, 46, 96, forestry: 111-112  
 Foundation for Aid to the Indian People: 152  
 Fox, Donald T.: 190  
 France: 176, military advisors: 192, 195, 197  
 Friends of the Country: 148  
 Fuentes Corado, Federico: 140  
 Fuentes Mohr, Alberto: 162, 211  
 Fuentes y Guzmán, Francisco Antonio: 12  
 Fundamental Statute of Government: xviii, 138, 139, 144, 200, army and: 181, 190, 194, Belize and: 168, local government: 146, 147, religion under: 150

*Guatemala: A Country Study*

- Ganza, Gabino 15  
 Gallardo, Carlos 158  
 Gálvez, Mariano 16  
 García Granados, Jorge 24, 134, 164  
 García Granados, Miguel 17, 183  
 García Granados, Raul 134  
 General Archives and Supporting Services of the General Staff of the Presidency 140  
 General Association of Industrialists 148  
 General Confederation of Guatemalan Workers 153, 154  
 General Directorate of Statistics 48  
 General Staff of the Army 139, 194  
 General Staff of the Presidency 139, 140, 141  
 geography 45-48  
 Germans 18, land confiscated, 104, plantation owners 19, 22, 24  
 Girón Sánchez, Manuel de Jesús 140  
 Glénese, Piero 213  
 godparents 67, 68  
 Goetting, Ann 204  
 González López, Luis Arturo 30  
 González Rodas, Adolfo xvii  
 Goodman-Martínez-Thompson calendar 6  
 Gordillo, Martínez, Francisco Luis xvii, xviii, xiv, 135, 138, 180, 188, 198  
 Gospel Outreach 152  
 government role in the economy: *see also* Agrarian Reform Law xxiv, 86, 90-94; industry 117; monetary policy 119, 120, 124, 125  
 gross domestic product xii, xxiv, 85, 88, 89, 90, 92, 193; foreign trade 122; manufacturing 115  
 Group of 77 168  
 Guatemala (department) xvi, crime 203; health care 80; population 49, 67  
 Guatemala City (capital) xvi, 5, 7, 46, 60, 62, 93, 204; government 147; health care 79, 80; housing 36; industry 117; police 201, 202; schools 72; violence 135, 161, 180  
 Guatemalan Agricultural Association (AGA) 148, 156  
 Guatemalan Bar Association 158  
 Guatemalan Christian Democracy (DCC) 156, 164, 165  
 Guatemalan Committee of Patriotic Unity (CGUP) 157, 158, 160, 162, 166  
 Guatemalan Confederation of Trade Unity (CUSG) 155, 157  
 Guatemalan Freedom Foundation 148  
 Guatemalan Journalists' Association 157  
 Guatemalan Labor Party (PGT) 33, 154, 156, 158, 161, 162, 207; legal status 25, 32, 185; PGT-Núcleo 157, 216  
 Guatemalan National Revolutionary Unity 157, 160, 216  
 Guerrilla Army of the Poor 37, 157, 160, 216  
 guerrilla insurgency xiii, 4, 31, 37, 131, 132, 207, 208; effects 86, 90, 123; on organizations 157, 158, 216  
 Guevara, Angel Amad 1982 election and 133, 166, 167, 186, 187, 188  
 habeas corpus 189, 201  
 Haiti 173  
 Halter Marine Services 196  
 health care xii, 77, 80  
 Herbringer Asturias, Arturo xiv, xvi  
 Herrera, Carlos 20  
 Highlands 5, 6, 45, 46-47, 68; agriculture 97, 98, 100, 101, 106, 107; earthquake 36; economy 90, 94; health care 80; industry 118; insurgency 161  
 Honduras xvi, 5, 7, 15, 16, 172, 173; common market and 116, 225; president's daughter 162  
 housing 60, 61, 91, 119  
 Huehuetenango (department and capital) xvi, 17, 47, 48, 93; mining 115  
 hydroelectric power xii, 85, 89, 91, 92, 114, 115, 123  
 Hom, Gaspar 216  
 imports xii, 102, 122, 225, 226; food 96, 108, 109; oil 89, 92, 114; restrictions 124  
 income 50, 57, 85, 87; taxes on 32, 92  
 independence 14, 15  
 Indians 13, 19, 50, 53-57, 118, 143; education 72, 77; guerrillas and 213, 216; health care 78; land ownership 3, 20, 37, 101, 103; literacy xxiv, 54, 76, 196; military service xviii, xi, 190; mistreatment and exploitation 7, 21, 146; population xiii, 52, 53, 61; religion 8, 12, 16, 64, 68, 70, 71, 74; social structure 70, 101, 102, 118, 182, 200, 204; suffrage 23, 29; women 62, 66  
 indigo 13, 14, 18  
 industry: *see also* United Fruit Company xii, xxiv, 85, 112, 114, 118  
 inflation 50, 121  
 inheritance 64  
 Inquisition 12, 13, 14  
 Institutional Democratic Party (PID) 31, 32, 34, 35, 156, 163, 165, 166  
 insurance companies 120  
 Inter-American Development Bank xiv, 124, 174  
 Inter-American Highway 93  
 Inter-American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance xiv, 192  
 interest group associations: *see also* political organizations by name 147, 156; business 147, 148; labor 153, 155, 157

- interest rates 120-123  
 international agreements and member ships xiv  
 International Bank for Reconstruction and Development 57  
 International Military Education and Training IMET 174-192, 194  
 International Monetary Fund xiv, xviii, 86, 93, 124  
 International Railways of Central America IRCA 20, 21, 22, 25, 34  
 International Sugar Agreement 10  
 Israel 134, military assistance 176, 193, 197  
 Italy 134, 176, 197  
 Iturbide, Agustín de 15  
 Izabal department xvi, 32, 45, insurgency 208, landownership 104, 106  
  
 Jalapa department and capital xvi, 93  
 Japan 122, 176  
 Jesuits 9, 12, 17, 18, 71  
 John Paul II, Pope 72, 74, 152, 215  
 Juaros, Domingo 12  
 Judaism 13  
 judiciary *see also* special courts 144, 145, appointment of judges 136, violence against 158  
 Jutiapa department and capital xvi, 93  
  
 Kaibiles unit 201  
 Kekchi dialect 52, 76  
 Kinzer, Stephen 28  
  
 La Aurora Air Base 195  
 La Aurora International Airport 188  
 labor force *see also* unemployment and underemployment 51, 89, 94, 95, 223, agriculture xxiii, xxiv, 85, Indians 19, 55, 56, 102, industry 51, 118  
 labor organizations 95, 153, 155, 157, agriculture 4, 24, 29, 36, 103, illegal 139, industry 51  
 ladinos xxiii, 43, 50, 53, 61, 196, cultural attitudes 52, 54, employment 146, military service 190, population 52, religion 74  
 Lago Amatitlán 46  
 Lago de Amílán xvi, 46, 47  
 Lago de Izabal xvi, 47, 115  
 Lago Peten Itzá xvi, 47, 48  
 lakes *see also* under Lago xvi, 46, 47, 48  
 land reform *see also* Agrarian Reform Law xxiii, xv, xxii, 4, 18, 29, 58, 100, 106, Arbenz regime and 25, 27  
 land use 96, 100  
 Landa, Diego de 6  
 Landívar University 77  
 landownership *see also* Indians 87, 100, 106, 223, absentee owners 59, 60, disputes over 18, 98, 155, large plantations xxiii, xxii, 4, 13, 58, 109, unequal tenure patterns xxiii, 5, 57  
 languages *see also* Spanish language xii, xxiii, Indians 9, 51, 52, 64  
 Las Casas, Bartolomé de 8, 9  
 Latin American Labor Confederation 154  
 Langerud García, Kjell Eugenio, elected president 34, 35, landholders and 155, presidency 36, 133, 153, 154, 186, 193, 210, United States and 37, 211  
 law enforcement 146, 200, 203  
 laws *see also* Agrarian Reform Law, Decree Laws, vagrancy laws, adult literacy 77, amnesty 32, electoral code 167, labor 19, 24, 103, 153, oil companies 112  
*Le Monde* 34  
 Liberal party 16, 18, 150, 183  
 libraries 21  
 literacy xii, xxiv, 24, 54, 76, suffrage and 23, 29, 31, 167  
 livestock 110, 111  
 Livingston 48, 51  
 local government 137, 145, 147, chain of command 144, 195, funding 94  
 Lodge, Henry Cabot 28  
 López Bonilla, Hector Mauricio 188  
 López Fuentes, Hector Mario xiv, xvi, xxii, 139, 194  
 Los Altos 17  
 Los Amates 93  
 Lucas García, Fernando Romeo xxiii, 37, 134, 135, 149, 164, 166, 167, 211, foreign relations 172, 212, regime 136, 138, 144, 157, 162, 186, 190, wealth 187, 188, 213, United States and 174  
 Lucas García, Manuel Benedicto 215  
  
 Maldonado Aguirre, Alejandro 166  
 Maldonado Schaad, Horacio Egberto xxii, 135, junta 180, 188, 198  
 malnutrition 78, 79  
 Mam dialect 52  
 manufacturing 31, 85, 88, 90, 115, 118, employment 94, 95, 223  
 marriage 65, civil 16, 17, 18, 64, 71, interethnic 63, 75  
 Marroquín, Francisco 9  
 Maryknoll order 33, 71, 214  
 Mayan Indians 5, 6, 52, 182  
 Mayan-Quiche languages 51, 64  
 Mazatenango xvi, 93  
 Mem, John Gordon 33  
 Mera Victores, Oscar Humberto, chief of state xvii, xv, xvi, xxii, xxv, minister of defense 138, 139, 180, 194  
 Méndez Montenegro, Julio César, elected president 32, 33, 132, 164, 167, 208, murdered 186, 213  
 Méndez Montenegro, Mario 32, 164, 186

# *Guatemala: A Country Study*

- Méndez Ruiz, Ricardo, xxii
- Metapán, 93
- metric conversion coefficients, 221
- Mexico, 6, 7, 171, 197, and, 124, oil from, 122
- middle class, xxii, 18, 34, 43, 50, professionals, 157
- migration, 32, 43, 51, 61, 62, 63, 90
- military cadets, 50, 198
- military commissioners, 132
- military officers, 138, *disponible*, 192, in government posts, xiv, 23, 146, 180, 207, perquisites and status, xxv, 133, 191, 198, political power, xxv, 32, 38, 129, 135, 186, wealth, 134, 157
- military police, 211
- military uniforms, insignia and ranks, 198, 199
- minerals and mining, 88, 90, 115, 224, labor force, 223, nickel, 32, 89, 121
- ministries, 141, 142, 143, 148, cabinet members named, xxii, 140
- Ministry of Agriculture, xxii, 105
- Ministry of Economy, 173
- Ministry of Education, xxii, 77
- Ministry of Foreign Relations, xxii, 168
- Ministry of Government, xxii, 132, 135, 140, 201, 202
- Ministry of Interior, *See* Ministry of Government
- Ministry of National Defense, 97, 140, 145, 194, 202
- Ministry of Public Health and Social Welfare, 79, 80
- Ministry of Public Instruction, 19
- missing persons, xxii, 136, 154, 184, 210
- MLN, *See* National Liberation Movement
- Modesto Méndez, 93
- Molina, Pedro, 16
- Monsanto, Pablo, 216
- Montes, César, 33, 208
- Montufar, Lorenzo, 20
- Moral Majority, 152
- Morales, 93
- Moran, Rolando, 216
- Morazan, Francisco, 16, 17, 183
- Moreira-Lopez, Carlos Armando, xxii
- Mormous, 151
- municipal government, 139, 146
- Muñoz Pilona, Carlos Rodolfo, xxii, 135, 188
- Munro, Dana G., 184
- Najera Farfán, Ivan, xxii
- names, ix
- Napoleon, 14
- National Coffee Association, 109, 148, 156
- National Committee for Trade Union Unity (CNUS), 36, 154, 157, 161
- National Confederation of Guatemalan Peasants, 153, 154
- National Confederation of Workers, CNT, 154, 157, 161
- National Council of Economic Planning, 140, 141
- National Democratic Movement, 30, 130, 165
- National Financing Corporation, 119
- National Housing Bank, 60
- National Institute of Agrarian Transformation, 105
- National Institute of Electrification, 34
- National Liberation Movement, MLN, xii, xxii, xiv, 30, 35, 156, 165, elections and, 32, 34, 166, violence and, 31, 163, 210
- national planning agency, 56, 91
- National Police, xiv, 22, 143, 200, 203, 204, 208
- National Renovation Party, 156, 165, 166
- National Unity Front, 156, 165, 166
- natural gas, 114
- navy, xiv, 196, 198, strength, xxiv
- New Anticommunist Organization, 33, 163, 209
- New Laws of 1542, 8
- New York Times*, 34
- news media, journalists killed, 156, news papers, 158
- Nicaragua, 5, 7, 15, 17, 38, 172, 173, common market, 116, 117, 225
- 1983 coup d'état, xiv, xvi, xxii
- 1982 coup d'état, 38, 135, 136, 139, 186, 189, 202, 213
- North American Chamber of Commerce, 148
- North American Congress on Latin America, 134
- Northern Transversal Strip, 36, 98, 111, 134
- November 13 Revolutionary Movement, 33
- nuclear energy, 140, 141
- Nucleus of Revolutionary Workers, 158
- October 20th Front, 207
- Office of the Presidency, 91, 141, 147, 164
- oil, 85, 112, 114, 123, exports, xii, 121, 224
- Operation Victory, 82, 213
- Orellana, José María, 20, 21
- Organization of American States, xiv, 168
- Organization of People in Arms, ORPA, 38, 157, 161, 216
- Organized Aramista Center, 165
- Organized National Anticommunist Movement (MANO), 163, 209, 213, Mano Blanca (White Hand), 31, 33
- Ortiz, Frank, 174
- Ottien Prado, Arnaldo, 210
- Oxkam America, 214

- Paz Novales, Ernesto 210  
 Panama 5, 116, 173, military education 192, 194, 197  
 Parízos Massacre 37, 58, 155, 211  
 Pavón Penal Farm 204  
 Payban 93  
 Peralta Azúrra, Enrique 166, comp. 31, 131, 186, 207-208, election, 37, 167, regime 32, 132, 144, 148, 163, wealth, 134  
 Peralta Méndez, Ricardo 36  
 Pernera, Rafael 131  
 Peten department 5, 45, 48, 56, 111, 195, agriculture 97, 98, 99, 104, colonization, 24, 36, 58, people 52  
 Pearloff, John E. 28, 29  
 PGE. *See* Guatemalan Labor Party  
 Phillip H. King 12  
 PID. *See* Institutional Democratic Party  
 police. *see also* National Police: xiv, 135, 211, local 146, training 174, secret police 202  
 political exiles 22, 32, 130, 156, 160, 166, 171, 198, displaced persons, 214  
 political parties. *see* 162, 166, 189, acronyms 156, far right xviii, xxiii  
 Ponce Nitch, Hernán 202  
 Ponce Vaides, Juan Federico 23, 184  
 Poor Peoples Coordinator 160  
 Poptun 93  
 Popular Revolutionary Movement 161  
 population: xii, xxiii, 48-50, 97, growth, 106, urban 60-61  
 Population Reference Bureau 49  
 ports. *see* 93  
 poverty 43, 50, 57, 80  
 Pratt, Joseph H. 201  
 Premio, Daniel L. 210  
 prices 120, 121  
*Prison Journal* 204  
 prison system 21, 204  
 Prolonged Popular War 160  
 promotion of military officers. *see* 133, 191, 192  
 Protestantism. *see also* Church of the Word: xxiv, 74, 76, 150, 151, 214, evangelical sects xvii, xviii, xxiv, 152  
 PSD. *See* Socialist Democratic Party  
 public debt. *see* 92, foreign debt 120, 124  
 public health 21, 24, 79, 80  
 Puerto Barrios 25, 47, 48, 114, air base 195, airport 93, earthquake. *see* 36, 46  
 Quezaltenango department and capital. *see* 17, 46, 93, crime 203, 204  
 Quiché department. *see* 6, 106, civil disorders 37, 151, 160, Nebaj program 147  
 Quiché dialect 52, 76  
 Quiché tribes 182  
 Rabinal people 7  
 railroads. *see* 20, 34, 93, 103  
 rainfall 45, 46, 110  
 Ranguana and Sapodilla cays 170  
 Reagan, Ronald. Central American policies. *see* 174, 175, 193, Guatemala and 214, 215  
 Rebel Armed Forces, FAR 33, 157, 161, 207, 208  
 refugees 86, 171  
 religion. *see also* Indians, Protestantism, Roman Catholic Church: xii, xxiii, 12, 15, 68, 76, 150, in the schools 30, 71  
 Realesa, Antonio de 12  
 Retalhuleu department and capital. *see* 93  
 Revolutionary Christians 160  
 Revolutionary Movement, Alejandro G. León, November 13, 207, 208  
 Revolutionary Party, PR 32, 34, 35, 159, 164, 165, 166  
 Revolutionary Workers' Party of Guatemala 25  
 Reyna Barrios, José María 20  
 rice 108, 223, 224  
 rifles and beans program 215, 219  
 Rio Camanero 47  
 Rio Cuyolate 47  
 Rio de la Pasión 47  
 Rio Dulce 47  
 Rio Grande 47  
 Rio Ixcán 47  
 Rio Michatoxa 47  
 Rio Mopan 47  
 Rio Montaña 47, 48  
 Rio Paz 47  
 Rio Salinas 47, 48  
 Rio Samalá 47  
 Rio San Miguel 47  
 Rio San Pedro 47  
 Rio Sarstun 47  
 Rio Treaty. *See* Inter American Treaty of Reciprocal Assistance  
 Rio Usumacinta 47, 48  
 Ríos Montt, José Efraim. *see* 50, agriculture 60, 106, 107, economy and 85, 93, 123, 124, 149, electoral code and 166, 167, foreign relations 168, 172, 175, 193, 215, human rights under 137, 153, 157, 213, 214, in politics 34, 35, 164, 180, 210, 1982 comp. 38, 135, 188, 198, presidency assumed 139, 189, 200, public broadcasts 152, regime 138, 140, 145, 158, religion and xxiv, 75, 136, 150, replacement xvii, xix, xx  
 Ríos Montt, Mario 151, 152, 153  
 Rivas García, Mario Augusto 188  
 rivers. *see also* Rio 47, 48  
 roads. *see* 17, 93, 163  
 Robertson, Pat 152

## *Guatemala: A Country Study*

- "Robin García" Revolutionary Secondary Students' Front: 158, 160  
 "Robin García" Revolutionary University Students' Front: 158  
 Rockefeller Foundation: 21  
 Roman Catholic Church: *see also* church and state: xx, 3, 33, 70, 72, 74, 136, 151, 152; Indians and: 8, 12, 16; ownership of property: 18, 30, 150  
 Roman Catholic clergy: xxiii, 33; civil marriages performed by: 18, 64; missionaries: 68, 70, 75, 76; monastic orders: 9, 12, 17, 18, 71, 151, 214  
 Rossell y Arellano, Mariano: 30, 150  
 rubber: 110, 223, 224  
 Rubelsanto: 47, 93, 112, 114  
 rural areas: 43, 58; children: 67, 79; education: 76; health care: 78, 80; income: 57; labor unrest: 155  
  
 Sacatepéquez (department): xvi  
 Sagastume Vidaurre, Ricardo: 145  
 Salama: xvi  
 San José: xiii, 93, 195, 196  
 San Marcos (department and capital): xvi, 17, 93  
 San Pedro (volcano): 46  
 San Salvador: 5, 16  
 Sánchez, Mario: 216  
 Sánchez Gudiel, Angel Arturo: 188  
 Sandinistas: xxi, 38, 172  
 Sandoval Alarcón, Mario: 30, 163, 166  
 Sandoval Villeda, Leopoldo: xxii, 35  
 Santa Cruz del Quiché: xvi, 93  
 Santa Elena: 195  
 Santa Rosa (department): xvi  
 Santa Teresa prison: 204  
 Santiago de los Caballeros: 7  
 Santo Tomás de Castilla (Matías de Gálvez): xiii, 48, 91, 93, 114; naval base: 196  
 Savaché: 47, 93  
 Schleinger, Stephen: 28  
 schools (*see also* Escuela Politécnica): 76-77, 95; military: 176, 180, 192, 197; religions: 9, 72; vocational: 95  
 Schwartz, Norman: 56  
 Secret Anticomunist Army (ESA): 37, 156, 163, 213  
 Sereseres, Caesar: 133  
 Serrano Elías, Jorge Antonio: xxii, 143, 144  
 services sector: 88, 90, 95, 223  
 Sewart Seacraft: 196  
 Shell oil company: 114  
 Sierra de Chuacús: 47  
 Sierra de las Minas: 47  
 Sierra de Santa Cruz: 47  
 Sierra Madre: 46, 47  
 Simons, Marliese: 216  
  
 Sisniega Otero, Leonel: xviii, xix, 135, 138, 163  
 size: xi, 45, 96  
 slavery: 15  
 Smith, Waldemar: 55, 72  
 social security system: 23, 133, 137  
 social stratification: xxiii, 38, 52, 53, 56; traditional farms: 58-59  
 social welfare: 24, 133, 140, 142  
 Socialist Democratic Party (PSD): 156, 162, 166  
 soils: 45, 48, 98; erosion: 97, 111  
 Sololá (department and capital): xvi, 17, 93  
 Somoza Debayle, Anastasio: 172, 174  
 sorghum: 108, 223, 224  
 Spain: 3, 6, 14, 15, 168, 176, 183; embassy seizure: xxi, 155, 158, 212  
 Spanish language: xxiv; importance: 54, 55, 56, 64, 76, 77; literacy training for conscripts: 191, 196  
 special courts: for guerrillas: xviii, xx, 145, 190, 200, 202; secret trials: 189, 203  
 Spiegelner Noriega, Otto: 133, 134  
 Spinden and Makemson calendar: 6  
 Sprei, Karl von: 33  
 state of siege: 131, 132, 136, 137, 139, 146, 153, 156, 189-190, 200, 210, 213; state of alarm: xix, xx  
 students: assassinated: 77; in military service: 190, 194; political activism: 22, 25, 155-156, 184  
 Suazo Córdova, Roberto: 162  
 Suchitepéquez (department): xvi  
 sugarcane: 121, 223; exports: 18, 87, 108, 110, 224; growers associations: 148  
 Supreme Court: 144, 145  
 Supreme Electoral Tribunal: xix, xxi  
 Switzerland: 176  
  
 Taiwan: 176  
 Tapachula: 93  
 taxes: 91, 92, 146, 222; agrarian reform: 26, 104; idle land: 103, 105; income: 32; tax reform: xx, 86; VAT: xviii, xx, xxii  
 teachers: 77, 158  
 Tecún Umán: 182  
 Tejada de Putzeys, Eugenia Isabel: xxii  
 telecommunications: xiii, 91; radio broadcasts: xxii, 152  
 Texaco: 114  
 Tezulutlán: 7, 8  
 31st of January Popular Front (FP-31): 157, 158, 160, 161  
 Tikal: 47, 93  
 tobacco: 13, 110  
 Tolimán (volcano): 46  
 topography: xi, 47  
 Toriello, Jorge: 22, 25, 184  
 Torres Cheguén, Francisco: 196

- Totonacapan (department and capital): xvi, 93
- tourism: 38, 55, 86, 89, 90, 119, 123
- trade (*see also* exports, imports, United States): 13, 14, 19, 88, 89, 90, 92, employment, 94, 95, 223, foreign, 173, 176
- trade unions. *See* labor organizations
- transportation: xiii, 88, 91, 93, 94, 223
- Treaty of Tlatelolco: xiv
- Truman, Harry S.: 27
- Turcios Lima, Luis Augusto: 31, 33, 131, 185, 207, 208
- 12 April Movement: 207
- Ulloa, Jorge: xxv, 4, 21-22, 153, 184, overthrow, 129, United States and, 192
- unemployment and underemployment: 32, 50, 60, 90, self-employment, 51, 53, 61, 62, 63
- Union of Banana Exporting Countries: 110
- United Front of the Revolution (FUR): 143, 156, 165, 166
- United Fruit Company: xxv, 4, 20, 21, 25, 88, 185, land reform and, 27, 28, 29, 104, 105, mail service, 102, reorganization, 33-34, 103
- United Nations: 24, 168; member, xiv; Economic Commission for Latin America, 116
- United States: business associations from, 148, diplomatic relations with, 29, 132, 168, 173-175, 193, 208; private religious organizations from, 152, trade with, 19, 108, 110, 122
- United States Agency for International Development (AID): 57, 98, 99, 100, 173, 174, 175, 179, 201
- United States Army Green Berets: 33, 192, 208
- United States assistance: aid supplied, 33, 36, 98, 108, 124, 173, aid withdrawn, 37, 193; military aid, 131, 132, 174, 175, 180, 192, 194, 195, 227
- United States Central Intelligence Agency: 49, Cuban exiles and, 186, 206; Guatemalan politics and, 4, 28, 29, 31, 130, 185
- United States Department of State: human rights report, 37, 134, 151, 174, 211
- United States Federal Bureau of Investigation: 22
- United States Military Assistance Program: 174, 196, 197
- United States Southern Command: xxi
- university education (*see also* University of San Carlos): 77
- University of San Carlos: 9, 119, 139, 143, student activists, 155, 156, victims of terrorists, 33, 77
- urban areas: 43, 60, 115, education, 76, health care, 79, 80, population, 52
- Uruguay: 197
- U.S.S. *Ranger*: xxi
- vagrancy laws: 19, 22, 24, 103
- Valle, José Cecilio del: 15, 16
- Vatican: 17
- Vázquez, Francisco: 12
- Venezuela: 122, 124
- Verapaz: 8
- Vides Casanova, Eugenio: xxi
- Villagrán Kramer, Francisco: 32, 38
- Volcán Acatenango: 47
- Volcán Atitlán: 47
- Volcán de Agua: 47
- Volcán de Pacaya: 47
- Volcán Tacaná: 46, 47
- Volcán Tajumulco: 46, 47
- volcanoes: 46, 47
- wages: 89, minimum, 24, 60, 61, 95, 153, 155
- Walker, William: 17
- Washington Office on Latin America: 214
- water supply: 78, 91
- water transport: xiii
- West Germany: 33, 208, aid, 124, 197, trade, 122, 176
- wheat: 108, 109, 223, 224
- Whitbeck, Harris: 140, 152
- White Hand. *See* Organized National Anti-communist Movement
- Woerner, Frederick: xxi
- women: xxv, 66, 190, 204, domestic service, 51, 62, dress, 58, 77, employment, xxii, 51, literacy, 23, 76
- wood products: 111, 118
- World Bank: xiv, 31, 57, 124, 174
- World War II: 22, 104
- Ximénez, Francisco: 12
- Ydígoras Fuentes, Miguel: 24, 28, 30-31, presidency, 131, 148, 185, 186, 206, 207
- yellow fever: 21
- Yon Sosa, Marco Antonio: 31, 33, guerrilla leader, 32, 131, 185, 207, 208, sister, 209
- Yugoslavia: 134, 176
- Yuja Xona, Gregorio: 212
- Zacapa (department and capital): xvi, 47, insurgency, 33, 34, 132, 133, 134, 208, railroad, 93

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